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2023

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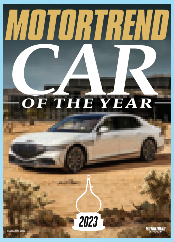
CONTENDERS...52
FINALISTS..........60
WINNER.............68



ON THE COVER Genesis went after big game and bagged a trophy. Photo: Evan Klein

2023 MOTORTREND CAR OF THE YEAR®

48

Our Car of the Year field is smaller than it once was, but the entrants are no less impressive.

Tests & Drives

30 Dream Deferred Fisker Ocean The unwavering Henrik Fisker might have finally delivered a winner. *Angus MacKenzie*

36 Performance Where It Matters
Lamborghini Urus Performante Sant'Agata Bolognese's new beast conquers corners. *Angus MacKenzie*

42 Brutal Utes Aston Martin DBX707 vs. Porsche Cayenne Turbo GT Two high-performance SUVs lay down the power. *Jonny Lieberman*

EST. 1949
VOL. 75 NO. 2

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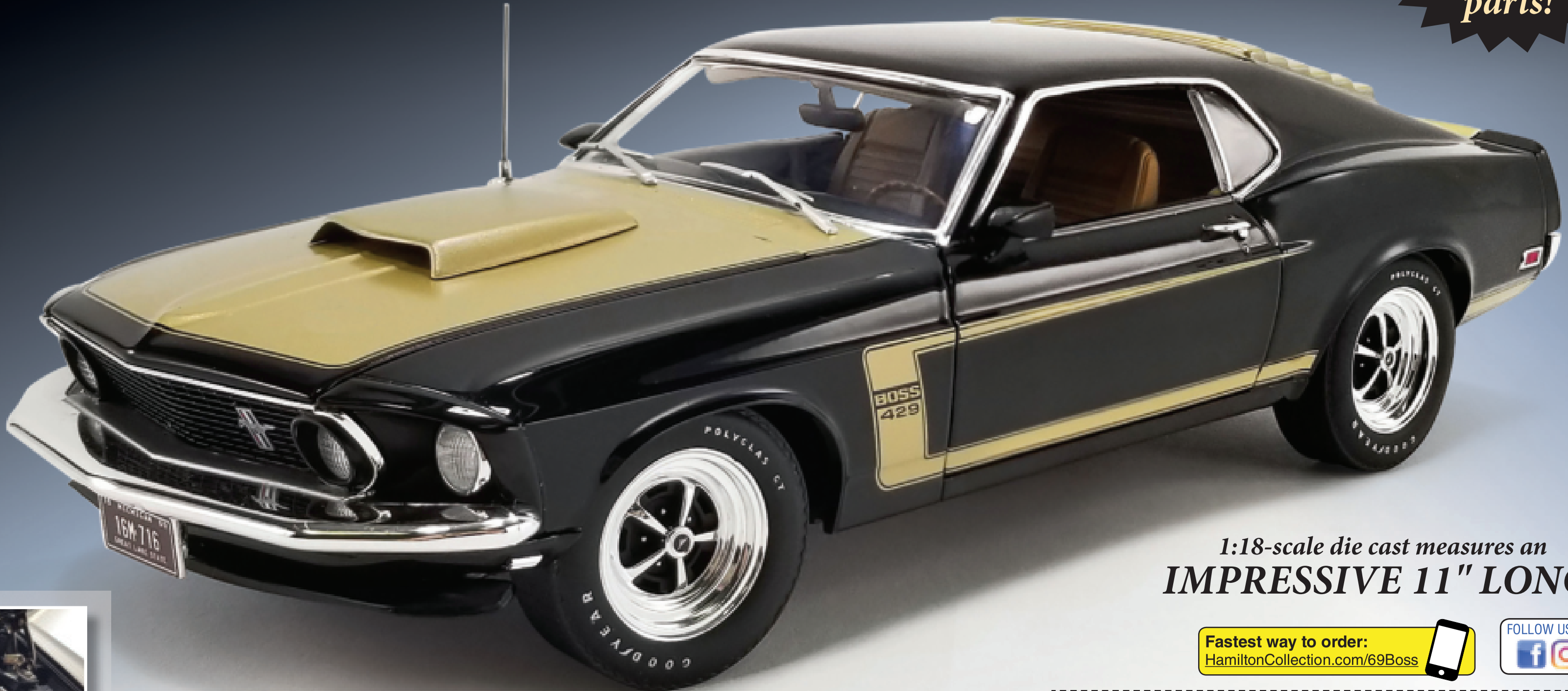

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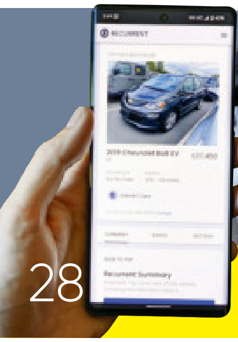
FIRST LOOK 14
Meet Cadillac's new $300,000 flagship.

Departments & Features

10 Editor's Letter The decline of the traditional "car."
14 Intake This month's hot metal.
28 Technologue Recurrent Range Score: like CarFax for EV batteries.
29 Your Say Responses to recent issues.
82 The Big Picture Is a Ferrari minus the internal combustion snarl still a Ferrari?

MTGARAGE

UPDATES Genesis GV70 • Hyundai Santa Cruz
Land Rover Defender 110 • Mercedes-Benz E 450
Ram 1500 TRX • Rivian R1T VERDICT Honda Odyssey
80



28

82

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Christian Seabaugh
Features Editor

Editor's Note

THE CAR'S FUTURE

PHOTO
DARREN MARTIN

Our small 2023 COTY field could preview things to come.

Looking at our 15-strong 2023 Car of the Year field, it's apparent we're witnessing the form's decline. Our field is not only smaller than in recent years but also more "foreign." The Detroit Three sell a total of 10 cars between them. Add Tesla and Lucid into the mix, and that number balloons to a whopping 13. A decade ago, the Detroit Three alone sold upward of 30 car models. This year's COTY field featured just one American car.

But what if we're looking at the car's decline the wrong way? What if we're being colored by recent biases? What if the traditional car—typically a three-box design with a distinct hood, body, and trunk—was a historical anomaly? Was the SUV's rise inevitable?

Looking back at the bestselling vehicles of the past 100 years, there might be something to this. In the car's early days, when the Model T reigned supreme, the majority of cars sold were what Ford called "flatbacks." These were trunkless two-box vehicles (meaning the basic design consisted of a box for the engine compartment and a larger box for passengers), with high-riding suspensions designed for the two-tracks that passed as roads.

Sound familiar?

This body style was among America's most popular until the end of World War II, when automakers stopped building Shermans and started building sedans. Why? The Joes returning from overseas and the Rosies fresh off factory lines wielded a historically large amount of economic power for the middle class, and they could afford two cars. Typically, these were a stylish sedan for around town and a more practical station wagon for road trips on the new interstate highway system.

The car continued to predominate as the greatest generation passed the torch to baby boomers. It wasn't until 1982 when things began to change. That year, in the heat of the Reagan-era recession, the Ford F-Series toppled the Oldsmobile Cutlass, becoming the bestselling vehicle in the U.S. A rotating cast of sedans and the F-Series (with Chevrolet's Silverado predecessor not far behind) would trade blows in the sales race until 1995. That's when the new second-generation Ford Explorer outsold all other vehicles in the U.S. aside from Ford's and Chevy's full-size pickups. From that point forward, SUVs were always found among the country's sales leaders. By the 2010s, they dominated.

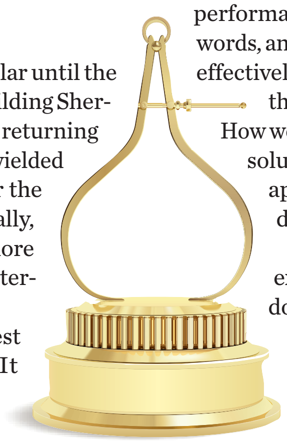
There are likely thousands of reasons for this, but I theorize the middle class' shrinking purchasing power, the generational debt saddled to Gen X and millennials, and a confluence of other economic and social factors are driving the turn to SUVs and the resurgence of the traditional two-box shape. When you can only afford one new vehicle, it must be capable of meeting any foreseeable need, whether it be shuttling around a family addition, chasing the job market across a continent, or just enjoying the use of our interstates and national parks. (As an aside, Model T's were commonly used for more than just transportation as people employed them often in place of tractors or to power equipment.) SUVs may be more inefficient than the sedans they replace, but they're more practical and comfortable for many families and often handle 21st-century America's increasingly inconsistent roadways better than their car counterparts. They're usually more expensive than comparable cars, sure, but when you look at the things they can do that a car can't, the value argument starts to crack.

So what does this mean for the car in 2023? Well, if our Car of the Year field is any indicator, it's a great time to be a well-heeled car enthusiast. With the SUV going mainstream, cars are becoming highly specialized. Of our 15 entrants this year, four were traditional luxury four-doors, three were electric luxury sedans, two were sport coupes, three were high-performance sport compacts, one was a luxury roadster, another was a '70s-style personal coupe masquerading as a modern four-door fastback, and the last was the new Corvette Z06—our sole American entrant.

All 15 of these cars, to varying levels of success, were built to do one thing and do it well. The new 2023 Honda Civic Type R, for instance, is made to be a wallet-friendly track rat. Genesis' new flagship 2023 G90, on the other hand, aims to swaddle its occupants in coachbuilt-quality luxury. The Mercedes-EQ EQE-Class exists to out-tech Tesla. And the aforementioned Z06 is here to keep Ferrari and Lamborghini engineers awake at night.

With such differing purposes, it always helps to keep each contender in context. We rely on our six Of The Year criteria for this: advancement in design, efficiency, engineering excellence, performance of intended function, safety, and value. In other words, an EQE is not competing against a Civic; both models are effectively competing against themselves and the standards of their segments. The questions we seek to answer include: How well does the car do the job? Does its powertrain use novel solutions to advance the state of the art? Do its designers appropriately resolve sheetmetal lines and effectively deploy high-quality interior materials?

Regardless of whether news of the car's death is exaggerated, we'll continue doing what we set out to do in 1949, right as three-box car sales started taking off: keeping you abreast of all the trends in the motoring world. Our Car of the Year package begins on page 48. ■



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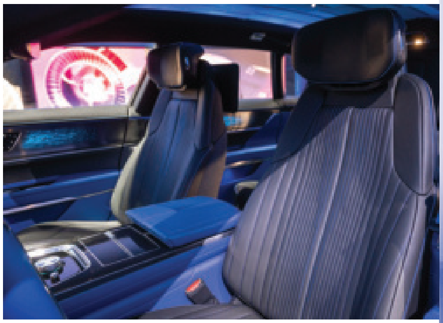
FIRST LOOK

PHOTOGRAPHY
STEVEN PHAM

2024 Cadillac Celestiq

The $300,000-plus Celestiq is the advanced, bespoke flagship you have to see to believe.



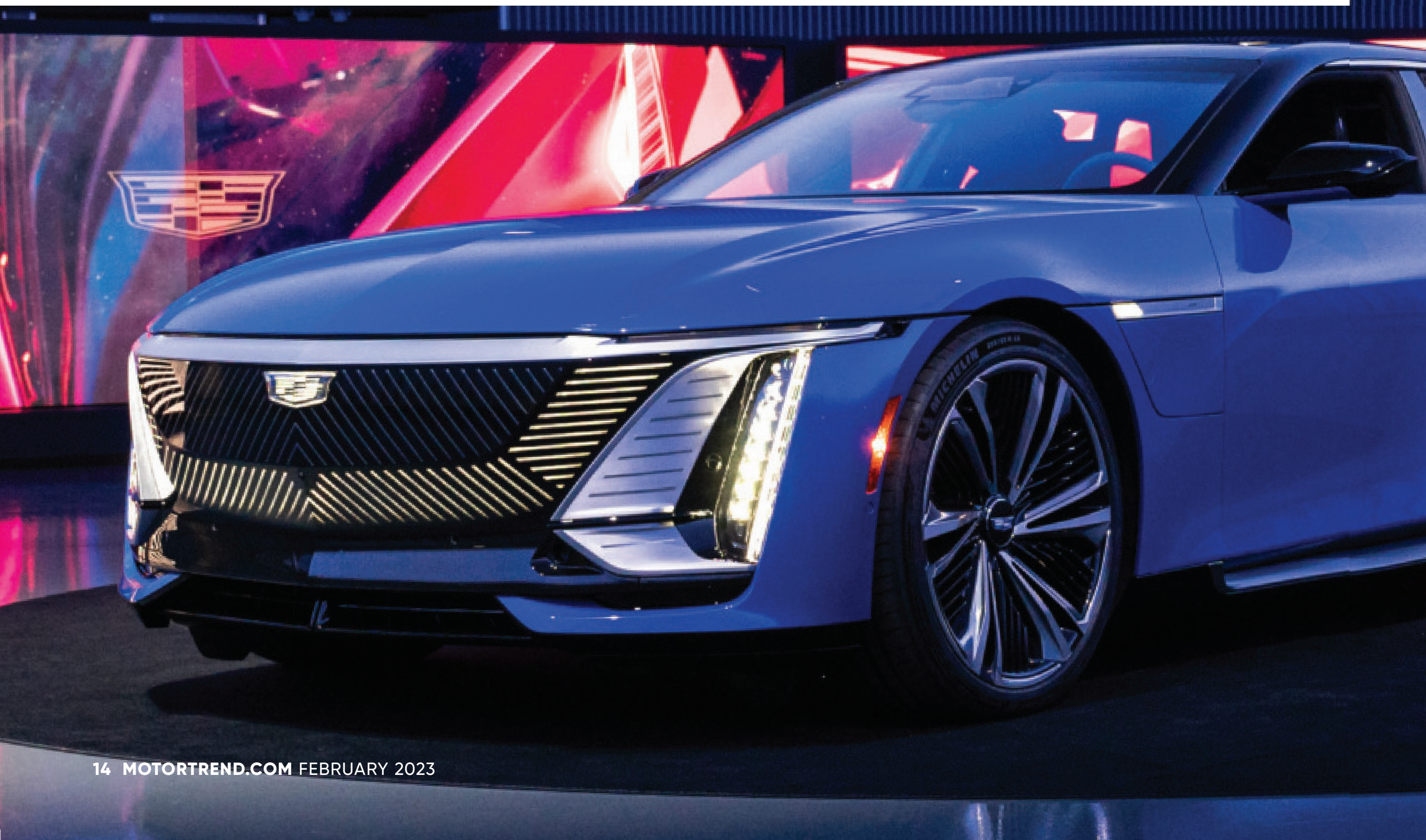
Is the 2024 Cadillac Celestiq for real? This head-turning, all-electric super-luxury sedan is longer than the brand's Escalade SUV and priced in a stratosphere Cadillac has long only dreamed of returning to. To wit: Pricing will start above the $300,000 threshold, but customers can easily add up to $100,000 more via customization, all but guaranteeing no two owners have the same exact car.

The mere fact Cadillac is producing the Celestiq is nearly as surprising as the vehicle itself, which fulfills a longstanding desire to build a proper flagship. An idea became a vision, then a concept car, and now a fabulous final-form four-door that brings to life almost all the gee-whiz features envisioned along the way. The Celestiq has an estimated 600 hp and 640 lb-ft of torque, a 0–60 time of 3.8 seconds, a range of more than 300 miles, and a 200-kW DC fast-charging system touted as being able to add 78 miles of range in 10 minutes. Electricity is stored in a 111.0-kWh battery pack that powers a two-motor all-wheel-drive system.

The Celestiq (pronounced suh-LESS-tick) will be handcrafted for worldwide consumption at GM's Global Technical Center in Warren, Michigan, where it was designed and engineered. Planned output will be just two examples a day, beginning in December 2023. No more than six vehicles will be in the assembly process at any one time. GM execs say they are already talking to interested consumers.

Buyers will work through a dealer, but the process will be managed by a personal concierge who will then make a connection with a GM designer. The buyer can travel to Michigan to view samples, ponder possibilities, and conceptualize their personal vehicle, or they can instead opt to have the GM designer travel to them. Any and all exterior colors are on the table, and with 115 3-D-printed parts that can easily be altered digitally, intricate personalized details are bound by little more than imagination. Want your signature etched into the metal plate on the dash? Done. Want to incorporate guitar strings from a rock icon (who may actually be you), a lock of a favorite pet's hair, or pressed flowers from your rose garden? These and nearly anything else can be worked into the interior to make a personal statement. The whole process could take up to 10 months to outline and complete.

This is how Cadillac plans to reach the top of the luxury ladder to take on Rolls-Royce, Maybach, and Bentley while



leaving Lincoln in its dust. But with long, dramatic lines, a windshield raked more steeply than a Corvette's, no exterior door handles, a giant hatch, and a huge smart-glass roof with embedded antennae and the ability to greatly vary in opacity, the Celestiq looks far more futuristic than anything rolling out of the old-money shops these days. That last ability eliminates the need for a sunshade or headliner, creating more headroom, and it also comes with a pretty sweet party trick: Each occupant can control how much light enters their portion of the roof.

The car's space frame is aluminum, and most body panels are carbon fiber, though the doors are made from a composite to allow the incorporation of sensors for the power-operated doors. (Even with these materials, the car weighs more than 6,000 pounds.) With no door handles, interior access is granted via a capacitive button on the B-pillar—or you can let the vehicle recognize the key fob and open itself upon approach. You can use the center console's touchscreen to open the door for an arriving passenger.

The Celestiq also marks the return of the "Goddess," the mascot that adorned Cadillac hoods from 1930 through the 1950s. Each front fender features an illuminated Goddess, and it also appears in the glass rotary control knobs on the center console and in digital form via the cabin displays. The Piet Mondrian–influenced Cadillac crest is similarly emphasized throughout, adorning each quadrant of the glass roof and appearing on the sidewalls of the special performance tires developed for the car in partnership with Michelin. The rubber wraps around massive 23-inch forged aluminum wheels.

The Celestiq continues Cadillac's signature vertical lighting, but here each individual LED is its own light source.

Digital micromirror headlamps feature 1.3 million pixels per side and are integral to a choreographed lighting sequence—which will also be customizable—that greets the owner. Plus, the height of the illumination on the vertical lights can be used as a gauge of the car's state of charge.

Each of the four seats is equally extravagant in terms of materials and pampering. All offer heating, ventilation, neck-warming, recline, massage, and access to screens. The front occupants interact with a 55-inch screen with digital blocking to prevent the driver watching, say, a movie playing on the passenger side of the dash. The AKG audio system has 38 speakers inside, as well as three outside as part of the electric vehicle sound-enhancement system. In the display car, the seats are wrapped in leather, as are the dash, doors, and even the floor, and the cupholders and cubbies are lined with microsuede. The upholstery can of course be customized, as well.

The Celestiq has an adaptive air suspension, the latest incarnation of GM's excellent Magnetic Ride Control, active roll control, rear steering, an active rear spoiler, and a full roster of the latest safety and driver assist systems.

"We've been trying to do a flagship for Cadillac for a while," vice president of global design Michael Simcoe said. Indeed, the Celestiq can trace its lineage to the Escala concept shown in 2016, which was once on its way to production with a V-8 before being abandoned when Cadillac made the decision to pivot to all EVs. Still, the spirit of the Escala inspired the Celestiq show car, which not only led to the handbuilt vehicle on these pages but also set the design tone for all future models from the long-running luxury marque.

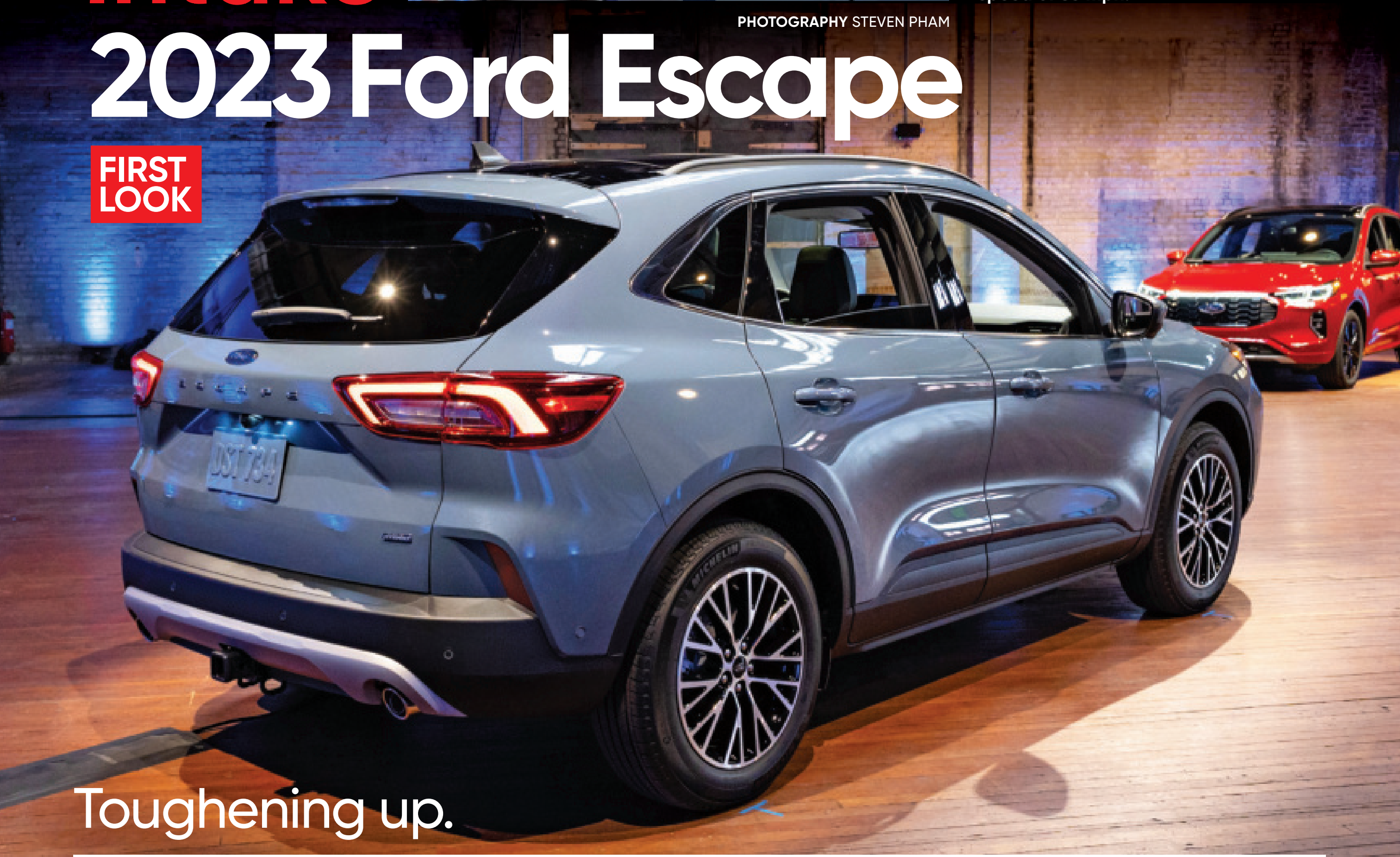
Cadillac has taken a bold step to reclaim its luxury heritage, hoping to be known once again—finally—as the "standard of the world." Now let's see if the world's wealthy are ready to follow the brand down the path. **Alisa Priddle**

The plug-in hybrid Escape offers four EV modes: Auto, EV Now, EV Later, and EV Charge, with a maximum possible fully electric speed of 85 mph.

PHOTOGRAPHY STEVEN PHAM

2023 Ford Escape

FIRST LOOK



Toughening up.

Few vehicles sharing the same basic platform are better differentiated than the boxy, go-anywhere Bronco Sport and the urban-outfitted, lozenge-shaped Escape. Had these C2 platform-mates looked more similar, the former might have cannibalized the latter's sales. Both are selling at or near capacity three years into the fourth-gen Escape's model run, but Ford has toughened up softer-looking Escape's visage and demeanor anyway.

Most of the redesign comes courtesy of a bolder new hood, which sits atop a more deeply sculpted grille flanked by a pair of LED-outlined "four-eyed" headlamps. On upper trim levels, a so-called "coast-to-coast" LED light strip connects these headlamp DRLs, illuminating the gap between the hood and grille. A new fascia incorporating a faux skidplate completes the makeover. Other exterior changes are minimal: new 17-, 18-, and 19-inch wheel designs, fresh LED taillamps, a false skidplate on the rear fascia, and the relocation of the hatch release from below to above the license plate.

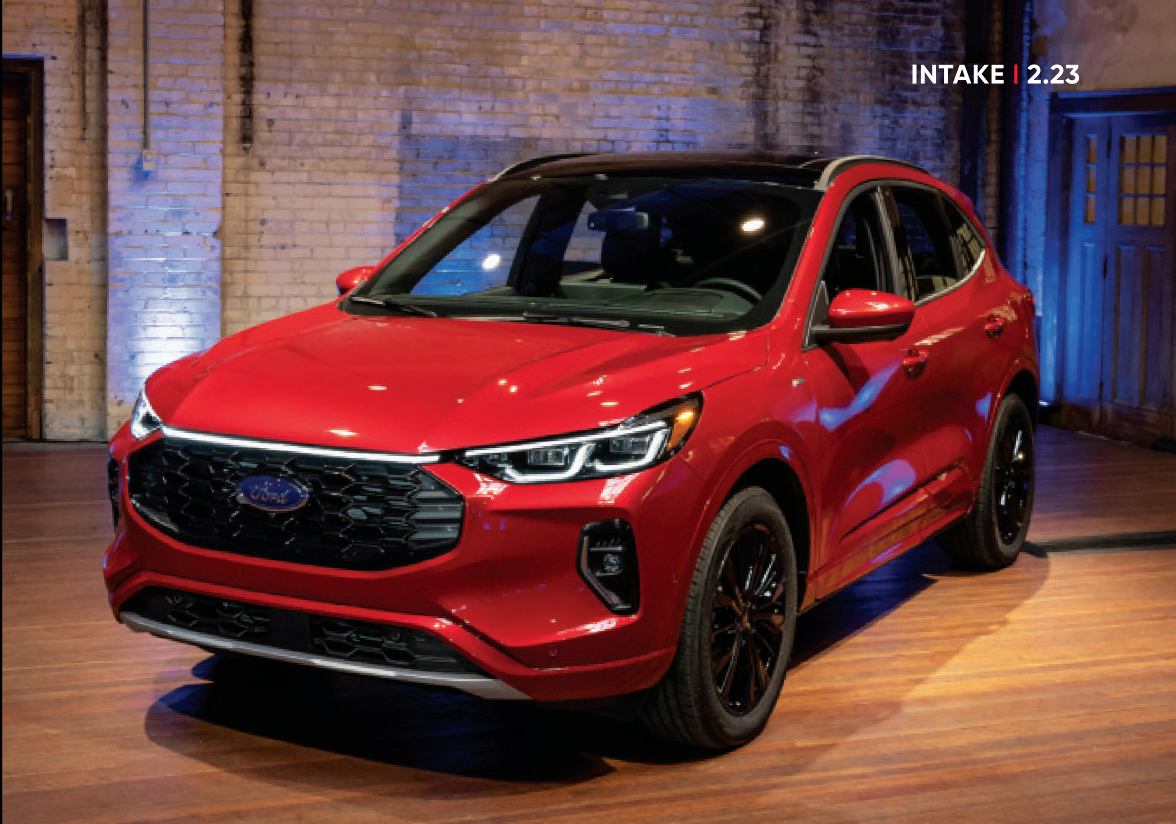
Further solidifying the Escape as the pavement-burner of the C2 platform's compact crossover lineup is a new ST Line package that blacks out all the main trim: grille, window-surround moldings, large single-wing rear spoiler, etc. Even the 19-inch wheels are black on top models. Further downplaying the ST Line's off-road ambitions are body-color wheel-arch moldings instead of dark gray.

Inside, there's red stitching and a flat-bottom steering wheel, though the seating material changes with different trim grades. That's the cool thing about the Escape ST Line—the look is generally available for about $995 more than an equivalent Escape in any trim. That means the least expensive 1.5-liter Escape ST Line starts at $31,335. ST Line Select and Elite models feature content that aligns with the regular versions. Ford expects half of all buyers to opt for the ST Line.

Gone are meaningless trim names like S, SE, and SEL, in favor of base, Active, and Platinum. That's a basic and a loaded trim level bracketing, one that offers several option packages to allow customers to tailor the Escape to specific wants. The base Escape starts at $28,995, the Active (which doesn't get a specific badge) rings in at $32,210, and the Platinum opens at $37,515 with the standard 2.0-liter AWD drivetrain; the conventional hybrid powertrain with front- or all-wheel drive is optional. The front-drive plug-in hybrid Escape tops the range as its own fully loaded trim level, priced at $39,995.

The 2023 Escape continues to offer two gas and two hybrid models with outputs

The Escape's new headlamps look much more expressive and more than a skosh BMW-esque, contributing to the tougher front-end look.



NEW ELECTRICAL ARCHITECTURE BRINGS NEW FUNCTIONALITY.

that, on paper, seem to be virtually carryover. But both the 1.5-liter EcoBoost turbocharged three-cylinder and the 2.0-liter EcoBoost turbo four-cylinder are essentially new engines, redesigned to comply with tightening emissions regulations. The hybrid and plug-in hybrid models use the same 2.5-liter Atkinson-cycle four-cylinder, with some minor tweaks to the output ratings attributable to a new method of measurement for this complex gas-engine/two motor-generator setup. The eight-speed automatic transmissions (EcoBoost) and planetary CVTs (hybrids) are unchanged, as is the optional all-wheel-drive system.

Ford's latest electrical architecture, first seen on the Mustang Mach-E and forthcoming Super Duty trucks, brings new functionality to the Escape, including the full cloud-connected Sync 4 infotainment suite, Ford Co-Pilot360 safety tech with intersection and blind-spot assist, evasive steering assist, reverse cross-traffic braking and brake assist, "OK, Ford" and Alexa voice commands (with a complimentary three-year subscription), and navigation with traffic rerouting capability.

Perhaps more important is the new architecture's ability to receive over-the-air upgrades to improve existing features or add new capabilities. The Escape gets upgraded screens, as well, with formerly optional cluster and central displays becoming standard, and the biggest central unit grows from 8.0 to 13.2 inches. The screens are all reconfigurable, and the 13.2-inch one incorporates all HVAC controls in a line of digital buttons that always remain visible along the bottom. Escapes with the 8.0-inch display retain physical HVAC buttons just below.

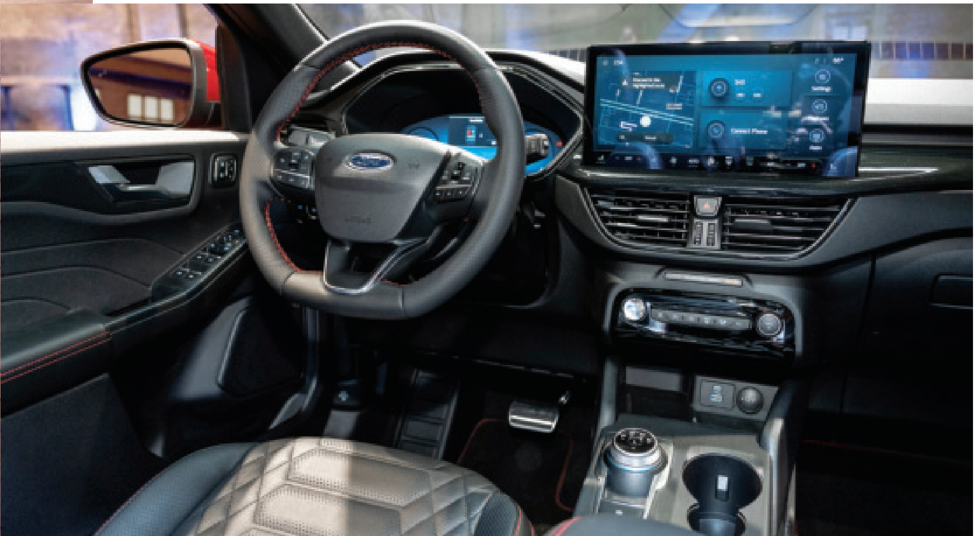
With pricing up only about $315, the upgradable electrical architecture alone is worth opting for a '23 model. The styling changes and ST Line appearance package look a lot better, and the bigger displays and decluttered dash are also worthy improvements. These midcycle changes should help Ford's fourth-bestselling vehicle continue to fly off dealer lots.

Will the Escape's sixth-place standing in our Ultimate Car Rankings change? The updates don't appear to address our primary complaints of lower-grade interior materials, an unsatisfying base engine, or the unsupportive driver's seat, so we'll have to wait until our next comparison test of this highly competitive class to find out.

Frank Markus

2023 Ford Escape

PRICE	$28,995-$39,995
LAYOUT	Front-engine, FWD/AWD, 5-pass, 4-door SUV
ENGINES	1.5L/181-hp/190-lb-ft turbocharged DOHC 12-valve I-3; 2.0L/250-hp/280-lb-ft turbocharged DOHC 16-valve I-4; 2.5L/165-hp/155-lb-ft Atkinson-cycle DOHC 16-valve I-4 plus 83-hp (front) electric motors, 199-210 hp/206 lb-ft (est, comb)
TRANSMISSION	8-speed automatic, cont variable auto
CURB WEIGHT	3,300-3,900 lb (mfr)
WHEELBASE	106.7 in
L X W X H	180.5 x 74.1 x 66.1 in
0-60 MPH	6.9-8.7 sec (*MT* est)
EPA CITY/HWY/ COMB FUEL ECON	22-44/31-38/26-41 mpg (gas, est); 117/93/105 mpg-e (gas+elec, est)
EPA RANGE (COMB)	408-582 miles (gas+elec, est); 37 (elec, est)
ON SALE	Early 2023



Intake

2022 Mercedes-AMG G 63 4x4^2

The 4x4 Squared returns, but it costs even more than ever.

FIRST DRIVE

Big news for all of you wealthy mud-bogging fans: The G-Wagen on portal axles has returned for a second generation. The 2022 Mercedes-AMG G63 4x4^2, or 4x4 Squared, is bigger, more powerful, more capable, and much more expensive.

The process of turning a regular G-Class into a 4x4^2 is fairly straightforward. In a sentence, the wheel hubs are swapped out in favor of portal axles, and that's most of it. What's a portal axle? It's a hub where instead of entering the center point of the wheel, the halfshafts go into the top of the hub and then are geared down. This creates more ground clearance. The new 4x4^2 has portals on both its solid rear axle and the independent arrangement up front—the world's first such setup.

Other changes include bigger wheels and tires, carbon-fiber fender flares, a carbon-fiber roof light rack, a harder-core-looking spare tire carrier, and perhaps the toughest rear bumper ever put on a vehicle.

Powering the biggest G 63 is AMG's 4.0-liter twin-turbo V-8. Here, it pumps out 577 hp and 612 lb-ft. Torque is routed through an off-road-tuned edition of AMG's nine-speed wet-clutch automatic transmission and a transfer case with permanent AWD. There are three locking differentials. Oh, and Mercedes claims it hits 60 mph in 5.0 seconds.

Mercedes also says the new 4x4^2 is 379 pounds lighter than before. If true, that's a good thing. Also good are the G-Wagen Squared's off-road geometries. The approach angle is a massive 41.3 degrees and the departure angle 36.8 degrees, with a breakover angle of 42 degrees.

Does it handle? Is it fun to drive? Yes and yes. If you can ignore the fact you're 7 feet in the air, you'd think you were driving a regular G 63. There's just something inherently excellent about a brick with way too much power that drives way better than it ought to. Add in the audacity of the extra height and heft, and you have a recipe for a grand old time. What about a curvy road? The more sweeping the corner, the better it felt. But the way the 4x4^2 handled tight twisties was damn impressive for a tank.

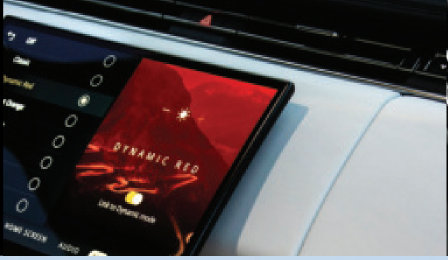
"Unstoppable" is the first word that springs to mind when taking the 4x4^2 off-road. We hit a difficult black-diamond trail called Rowher Flats, a mix of loose dirt and craggy rocks where we previously scraped a G 63's front fascia, and the 4x4^2 finished it unscathed.

It does like to go up on three wheels pretty often, and it sometimes feels detached from what's happening when its nose is pointed skyward. Part of the detachment has to do with how sealed the cabin is from outside noise and vibration. Remember, despite looking like a monster truck, this is a luxury vehicle.

Speaking of luxury, it starts at about $350,000, which is a lot of cash, especially when considering the old, non-AMG version began at $227,300. But if you're in the market for a super-high-end SUV that can actually do SUV things, it's basically a party of one. **Jonny Lieberman**

PHOTOGRAPHY
WILLIAM WALKER

2022 Mercedes-AMG G63 4x4^2	
PRICE	$350,000 (est)
PRICE AS TESTED	$359,050 (est)
LAYOUT	Front-engine, 4WD, 5-pass, 4-door SUV
ENGINE	4.0L/577-hp/627-lb-ft twin- turbo direct-injected DOHC 32-valve V-8
TRANSMISSION	9-speed auto
CURB WEIGHT	6,300 lb (mfr)
WHEELBASE	113.1 in
L X W X H	194.5 x 82.5 x 88.8 in
0-60 MPH	5.0 sec (mfr est)
EPA CITY/HWY/ COMB FUEL ECON	10/12/11 mpg (est)
EPA RANGE, COMB	291 miles (est)
ON SALE	Now



FIRST DRIVE

2023 Range Rover Sport

This one gets it right.

The first-gen Range Rover Sport that launched in 2004 was little more than a rebodied Land Rover Discovery. It wasn't nice to look at, and it wasn't sporty. When the next one arrived in 2013, it was more handsome but still drove like a cost-cut Range Rover. Now comes the third installment. Is it finally the full package?

It definitely looks great. There's this terrific gangster lean to it, along with subtle curves and a squashed, sloping roof that enhances the well-defined shoulder and beltlines. As for how it drives, we slid behind the wheel of multiple versions in Spain to find out. The U.S. will get the P360 and P400 with an inline-six, the P440e plug-in hybrid, and the V-8-totin' P530. We drove the latter, the P400, and a Euro-market P510e PHEV with more power than the P440e.

All of them proved, yes, it's finally sporty to drive, especially the P530. Acceleration from the BMW-sourced 523-hp twin-turbo V-8 is brisk—JLR isn't using its own eight-cylinder because it can't pass Euro 6 emissions, and the company is going all-EV besides. It's refined and quiet most of the time, with Sport mode providing some nice extra rumble. It tackles corners with zero drama, even when driven quite hard.

The P530 is also lovely and graceful to drive at a modest pace, with shockingly good ride quality. Massive 285/40R23 tires presage a harsh experience, but it's almost as cosseting and luxurious as it is enjoyable to pilot. The brakes are strong and feelsome, and the practically flawless eight-speed ZF transmission remains the best automatic in the business. Is this the finest-driving Land Rover ever? We'll go ahead and say yes.

As regards the other powertrains, the plug-in is also satisfying, but you can certainly feel its additional 500 or so pounds in the handling and acceleration. The P400, which Land Rover says is more than 350 pounds lighter than the P530, is slightly nimbler but also a touch poky. That's what a 128-hp deficit nets you. The V-8 is best, though if the PHEV can achieve an expected 51 miles or more of EPA-rated electric-only driving, that's something to consider. (A Range Rover Sport EV launches in two years.)

The cabin is Scandinavian in its sparseness, though the leathers are soft, thick, and plush enough that it also brings to mind an old English wingback chair. There are lovely secondary fabrics on the door cards and seats, as well as various trimmings that include chopped carbon fiber and open-pore wood.

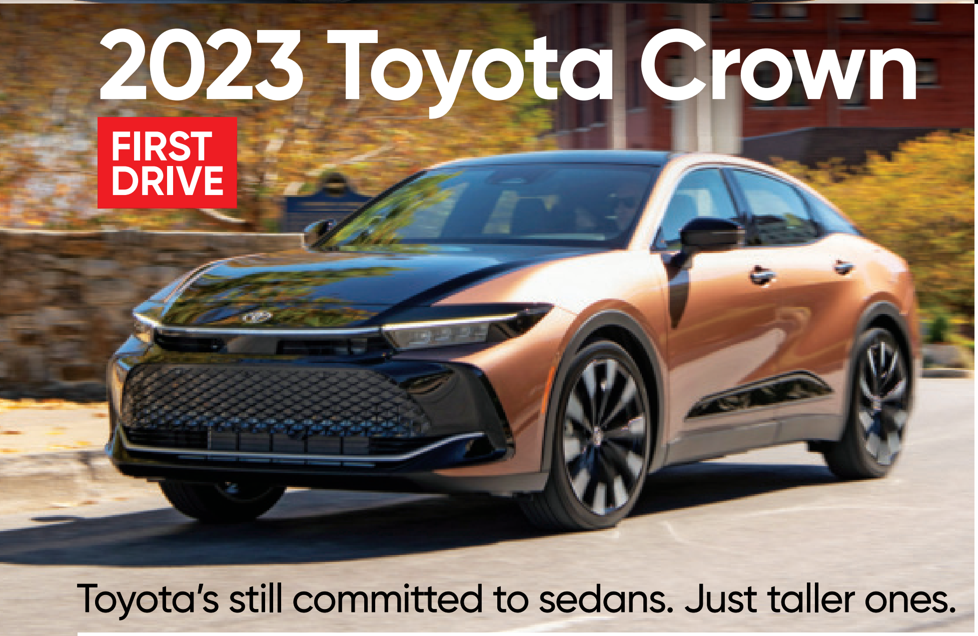
Most controls are found within the quick-acting touchscreen, but a physical knob toggles through the various off-road modes. And yes, we also went off-road. In fact, whereas many automaker press events feature separate demonstration vehicles specifically equipped for gnarlier terrain, here we simply activated the low-range transfer case, waited a beat for the air springs to raise the car about 2 inches, and hit the dirt. Even on rubber-band-like 23-inch all-season Pirellis, we conquered the rutted trails and rock-crawling events with ease.

Before, had anyone asked if the top-line Range Rover was worth the extra money over the Sport, the answer would have been "Absolutely." Now? The third-gen Sport is a deeply impressive SUV, and the answer has become, "Pick whichever one you like." **Jonny Lieberman**

RANGE ROVER
419 XCB

2023 Land Rover Range Rover Sport

PRICE	$83,475-$122,975
LAYOUT	Front-engine, AWD, 5-pass, 4-door SUV
ENGINES	3.0L/355-hp/369–406-lb-ft turbo direct-injected DOHC 24-valve I-6; 3.0L/355-hp/369-lb-ft turbo direct-injected DOHC 24-valve I-6 plus 141-hp electric motor, 434 hp/457 lb-ft comb; 4.4L/523-hp/553-lb-ft twin-turbo direct-injected DOHC 32-valve V-8
TRANSMISSION	8-speed auto
CURB WEIGHT	5,000–5,850 lb (mfr)
WHEELBASE	118.0 in
L X W X H	194.7 x 80.6 x 71.7 in
0-60 MPH	4.4–6.0 sec (*MT* est)
EPA CITY/HWY/ COMB FUEL ECON	16–19/21–26/18–22 mpg
EPA RANGE, COMB	428–524 miles
ON SALE	Now



2023 Toyota Crown

FIRST DRIVE

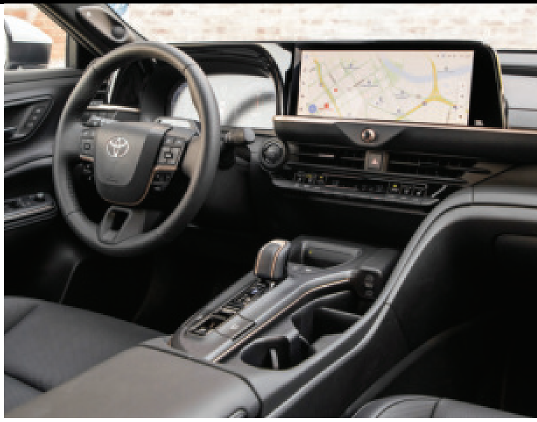
Toyota's still committed to sedans. Just taller ones.

The Toyota Crown has been the brand's flagship for 15 generations, so the new one has big shoes to fill and a reputation for excellence to uphold. Well, except in America, where no model has worn the badge since 1972. Here, then, the 2023 model must stand on its own merits as the functional replacement for the Avalon full-size sedan.

But being a big four-door is pretty much all the Crown and Avalon have in common. The former follows in the tire tracks left by AMC, Subaru, and even Volvo in being a lifted sedan; it's actually 4.1 inches taller than an Avalon, and seeing the Crown in person is no less odd than when viewing the photos here. You understand what you're looking at, but it's … strange. Credit to Toyota for the courage, though—the Crown looks like little else on the road today. Even so, the blacked-out grille is excessive, and two-tone paint treatments vaguely imply a sportiness that simply isn't here.

As did the latest Venza, Sienna, and Sequoia, the Crown launches with an all-hybrid lineup. A 236-hp system with a 2.5-liter four-cylinder, CVT, and all-wheel drive is standard on the XLE and Limited. The surprise—before the Crown Prime plug-in arrives—is the Platinum, which gets Toyota's new Hybrid Max setup. As in the 2023 Lexus RX 500h, the Platinum adopts a 2.4-liter turbo I-4, a six-speed automatic, and a more complex hybrid system that combines a motor up front with a motor and inverter at the back to deliver responsive acceleration and send a minimum of 30 percent of torque to the rear wheels. (Maximum torque distribution to the rear axle is 80 percent.) The Crown Platinum "only" makes 340 horsepower to the RX 500h's 366, but Toyota says the Crown is good for an estimated 5.7-second 0–60 time. It easily seems that quick on the road.

Both powertrains drive smoothly, and even the lower two trims feel more powerful than their 236 hp suggests. The 2.5-liter engine sounds a little grainy, but with 42/41 mpg city/highway and a nearly 600-mile combined driving range, that minor issue is forgivable. We couldn't put the Crown's handling to any real test during the drive event held near Nashville—a moderate pace was all we could reasonably achieve—but body control was commendable for a sedan on stilts that weighs about 4,300 pounds. Brake feel is also a highlight, delivering a near-seamless transition from regenerative to mechanical braking as you come to a stop.



Inside, the roughly $53K Platinum has a few subtle upscale copper trim pieces that look good, but the cabin overall lacks any sort of flair to match the exterior. The door panels are plain, and the materials are a so-so mix of high-quality stuff and harder surfaces. Things aren't hugely downgraded in the lower models, so a $46,645 Limited plus the optional 21-inch wheels achieves most of the style we assume will primarily attract buyers.

If you appreciate the way the Crown charts its own course, you'll end up with an intriguing sedan. If you don't, the more traditionally attractive VW Arteon may be up your alley. But like the rest of the full-size car space, the VW lacks the Toyota's efficiency and conversation-starter looks, which are merits the Crown can be proud to stand on. **Zach Gale**

2023 Toyota Crown

PRICE	$41,045-$53,445
LAYOUT	Front-engine, AWD, 5-pass, 4-door sedan
ENGINES	2.5L/184-hp/163-lb-ft Atkinson-cycle DOHC 16-valve I-4 plus 149-lb-ft front & rear electric motors, 236 hp comb; 2.4L/340-hp/400-lb-ft Atkinson-cycle DOHC 16-valve turbo I-4 plus 215-lb-ft front & rear electric motors
TRANSMISSIONS	CVT, 6-speed auto
CURB WEIGHT	4,250–4,300 lb (mfr)
WHEELBASE	112.2 in
L X W X H	196.1 x 72.4 x 60.6 in
0-60 MPH	5.7–7.6 sec (mfr est*)
EPA CITY/HWY/ COMB FUEL ECON	29–42/32–41/30–41 mpg (est)
EPA RANGE, COMB	435–595 miles
ON SALE	January 2023

*With 91-octane fuel; 87 is recommended otherwise

HONDA

We never let victory stop us. The Suzuka Circuit is a legend sketched in pavement, an international figure-eight racetrack in Japan's Mie Prefecture. In 2021, **the** fifth-generation Honda Civic Type R made history on the course, breaking the speed record for a front-wheel-drive car. The record was a **thrill** to achieve, but it wouldn't last long. Because when Honda engineers began work on the sixth-generation Type R, they set out to break it all over again.

Racing is an exercise in boundary-pushing. Crossing one threshold, only to seek out the next. For Honda, this tradition dates back to our first Formula 1® victory. In 1965, we won the FORMULA 1 MEXICAN GRAND PRIX, proving that a team **of** motorbike engineers could also build a world-class race car. But we didn't stop there. For the next six decades, we kept **racing**, rebuilding, and racing again. And in 2022, Max Verstappen won the FIA Formula One World Championship™ with technical support from Honda.

That same desire **lies** at the heart of Civic Type R–to always exceed one's last success. Honda engineers knew the 2023 model would need to outperform its predecessor. They started **in** the engine, optimizing it for 315 hp and 310 lb-ft of torque. They streamlined the exterior for downforce and stability. They also incorporated a data-logging system, LogR®, that displays the vehicle's real-time racing data both in front of **the** steering wheel and in the center-mounted touch-screen display. When they were done, the engineers had created the most powerful Honda production car ever–all in **pursuit** of victory on the Suzuka Circuit.

Last March, the all-new 2023 Civic Type R set a brand-new speed record. In final performance testing, it lapped the 3.6-mile configuration **of** the track nearly a second faster than the fifth-generation model. It was another landmark in automotive **excellence.** And it was a testament to the philosophy of always seeking new challenges.

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Intake

2022 Porsche 911 GT3 Touring

FIRST TEST No wing, no reason for prayer.

We don't blame you if you think to yourself, "Here we go again; *MotorTrend* is about to laud yet another 911 GT3." We also won't apologize, because few cars deserve the consistency of praise given to the latest 911 GT3 range, from the standard GT3 that won our 2022 Performance Vehicle of the Year award to the next-level-and-then-some GT3 RS we drove for the first time recently (January 2023). Now we've taken a 2022 911 GT3 Touring with a manual transmission to our testing grounds to see how the "least extreme" version gets on with its job.

The wing delete is the only significant performance-altering change between the GT3 and GT3 Touring models, thanks to the aerodynamic downforce lost by replacing the large, fixed version with an active rear spoiler and a unique engine-cover grille. Mechanically, Porsche provides its industry-leading positive-action six-speed manual gearbox as standard, but because the seven-speed twin-clutch PDK is a no-cost option, you might as well consider it standard fare, too. No surprise, the Porsche 911 GT3 Touring's base price of $164,150 is identical to that of the regular GT3.

A massive chunk of the normal 911 GT3's impressive racetrack performance comes from its aero; depending upon its wing settings, it makes up to 317 pounds of downforce at 125 mph and a max of 772 pounds at its 197-mph top speed. Considering our typical testing doesn't include a road course, we wondered how much of an impact the GT3 Touring's relative lack of downforce would have. Indeed, at 125 mph the Touring makes only 33 pounds of downforce, and just 88 pounds at its slightly faster top speed of 199 mph. In other words, the two cars are galaxies apart in aero performance.

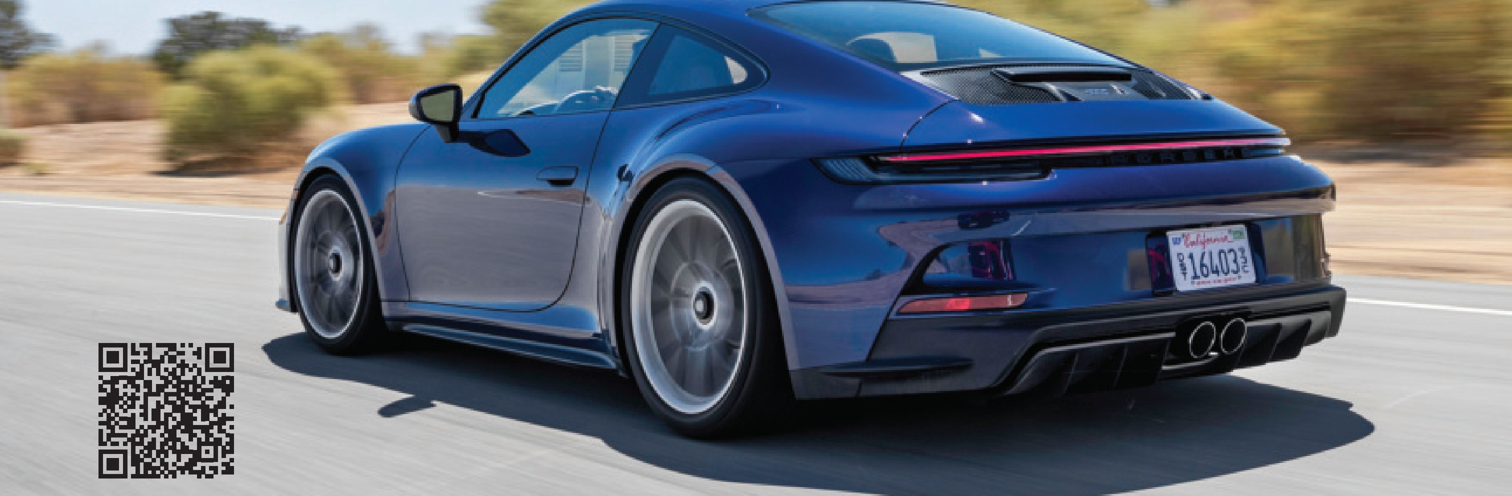
We previously tested the 911 GT3 with a PDK, but it's the manual version that won our 2022 PVOTY trophy that we'll compare against the 2022 GT3 Touring.

With their identical 4.0-liter naturally aspirated flat-six engines producing 502 hp and 346 lb-ft of torque, the regular GT3 accelerated slightly quicker to 60 mph (3.4 seconds versus 3.7) and through the quarter mile (11.4 seconds at 126.0 mph versus 11.7 at 123.6). This result is somewhat curious, considering the extra downforce of the standard version shouldn't afford it an advantage in these tests and, in the quarter mile, perhaps should produce more aero drag.

The 911 GT3 Touring and the standard edition dueled to an effective world-class draw in our 60–0-mph test, the latter winning the day at 93 feet compared to 94 feet. Both distances are neck-stretching results, and the brakes performed in typical Porsche track-car fashion: flawlessly. Additionally, the pedal's fabulous feel tells you what the car can do throughout the exercise, and it alerts you as to when you're approaching the limit. Meanwhile, the chassis is incredibly stable when you stand on the brakes, requiring quite some effort to force it to misbehave under even the most severe deceleration.

On the skidpad, both cars averaged an exceptional 1.19 g of lateral acceleration.

The interior gets extended black leather upholstery and a unique surface treatment on the dashboard and door panels.



PHOTOGRAPHY WILLIAM WALKER

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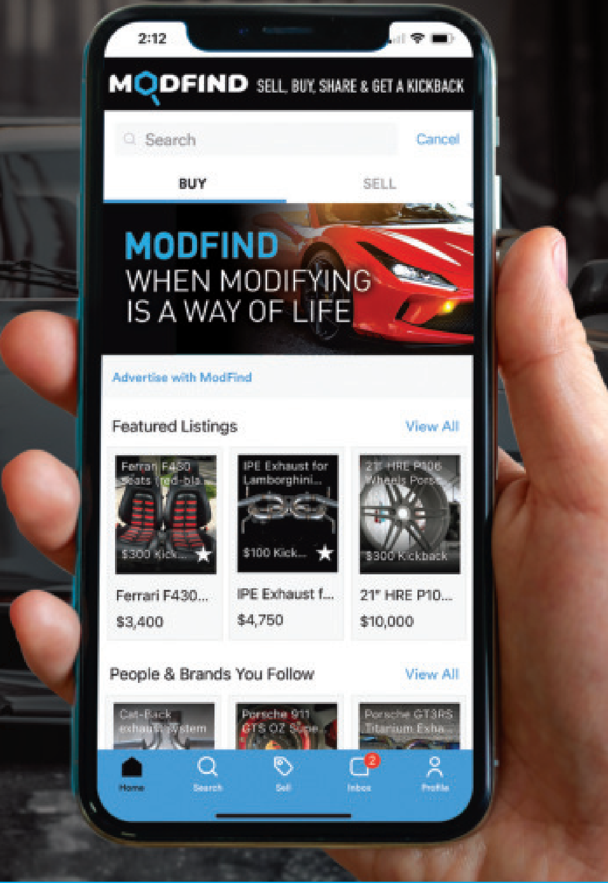
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WITH SO MUCH GRIP, YOU MUST DO SOMETHING STUPID TO LOSE CONTROL.

On our figure eight, which tests combined acceleration, braking, and lateral transition abilities, the regular GT3 triumphed by a small margin again, completing the lap in 22.1 seconds at 0.95 g (average) versus the Touring's 22.5 and 0.92. Anything in the 22-second range has achieved supercar territory.

The gearing is almost right for running the entire figure-eight lap in second, but you just begin to get into the rev limiter before the braking zone. So we tried doing it both ways: staying in second and hitting the limiter for a moment, and upshifting to third and back down to second for the cornering phase. As our data revealed afterward, the "upshift laps" were quicker because they added 3–4 mph to our top speed on the course. The brakes were tremendous and allowed us to apply them extremely late while remaining talkative enough to tell us precisely where the ABS threshold lay so we could avoid crossing into it and losing performance.

In terms of handling balance, we found a bit of understeer on the skidpad (at the nearly 1.20-g limit, mind you), but the car feels just about perfectly balanced. And on the figure eight, you can perform the old 911 trick at the exit where you lift the throttle briefly to kill understeer then mash it for a little tail-sliding action on your way out. It's an incredibly fun dance, and there's so much rear grip that you really must do something stupid to cause it to slide out of control.

Which version to buy is purely down to personal preference and usage cases. If we're going to own a 911 GT3, then we want to own it: not just the car itself, but everything that comes with doing so. We wouldn't be concerned with looking like wannabe racers, because we'd take the car to every track day we could fit into our schedule. That's what it's made for, and its downforce has massive effects on a road course and a stopwatch.

Rear wing or not, the suspension is rather stiff compared to most other 911s. Sure, you can make the car your daily driver, and we'd be happy to. But you only need to drive a GT3 for a few minutes on imperfect roads to realize its aggressive spring and damper setup isn't for everyone. It's not brutal, but the chassis talks to you constantly, which casual drivers may find annoying. Something like the 911 GTS makes more sense to us if you're not a track rat.

Yet if you want all the GT3's mechanical performance capability while desiring to live a somewhat more anonymous, non-track-centric automotive life, the 911 GT3 Touring delivers stupendous performance with virtually no weaknesses. In the case of this car, "least extreme" is extremely relative. **Mac Morrison**

2022 Porsche 911 GT3 Touring

PRICE	$164,150
PRICE AS TESTED	$180,160
VEHICLE LAYOUT	Rear-engine, RWD, 2-pass, 2-door coupe
ENGINE	4.0L direct-injected DOHC 24-valve flat-6
POWER (SAE NET)	502 hp @ 8,400 rpm
TORQUE (SAE NET)	346 lb-ft @ 6,100 rpm
TRANSMISSION	6-speed manual
CURB WEIGHT (F/R DIST)	3,251 lb (40/60%)
WHEELBASE	96.7 in
L X W X H	180.0 x 72.9 x 50.4 in
0-60 MPH	3.7 sec
QUARTER MILE	11.7 sec @ 123.6 mph
BRAKING, 60-0 MPH	94 ft
LATERAL ACCELERATION	1.19 g (avg)
***MT* FIGURE EIGHT**	22.5 sec @ 0.92 g (avg)
EPA CITY/HWY/COMB FUEL ECON	14/18/16 mpg
EPA RANGE, COMB	270 miles
ON SALE	Now

Intake

2023 Nissan Ariya

FIRST TEST Leaf take two?

PHOTOGRAPHY DARREN MARTIN

In December 2010, the Nissan Leaf became the first electric car to be widely available to Americans since gasoline-powered vehicles took off a century earlier. Compact, cute, and efficient, we dubbed it "remarkably unremarkable, in the best possible way." A long 12 years later—and after numerous manufacturers have launched multiple entrants into the EV space—the Leaf finally has an electric stablemate in the Nissan lineup. The question: Is the 2023 Nissan Ariya electric SUV "remarkably unremarkable," or will it stand out in an increasingly crowded field?

Although the Leaf was always sort of a niche vehicle for buyers, the Ariya is aimed at the heart of the American SUV market. The Ariya's specs likely won't raise the eyebrows of EV early adopters, but they're roughly analogous to the four-cylinder-powered compact crossovers Nissan expects most Ariya buyers will be swapping out of.

The Ariya launches with a 91-kWh battery pack and a front-mounted motor good for 238 hp and 221 lb-ft of torque, a healthy power bump over a comparable Nissan Rogue. The automaker also plans to offer a dual-motor all-wheel-drive version with 389 hp and 442 lb-ft of torque, as well as an entry-level model with a smaller 66-kWh battery pack.

Like the Leaf, the Ariya isn't a numbers car. Our front-drive test SUV accelerated to 60 mph in 7.5 seconds and covered the quarter mile in 15.8 seconds at 92.9 mph. Although it's quicker than many of its gas-powered rivals, that's slower than its electric competition. Of comparably equipped single-motor electric SUVs, the Ariya is closest to the VW ID4, which hits 60 mph in 7.3 seconds and runs the quarter mile in 15.8 seconds at 88.8 mph.

However, the Ariya isn't about outright performance. It's engineered to be a comfortable compact crossover that just so happens to be electric. On that front, it succeeds. Acceleration isn't neck-snapping, but the Ariya pulls away with the authority of a torquey V-6, and it has good passing power.

The Ariya rides and steers reasonably well. On the latter front, initial turn-in is surprisingly quick. That makes the Nissan fun when negotiating traffic, but the overall feel is otherwise numb when going down the road. The ride is comfortable, but there is a fair bit of body motion over expansion joints, potholes, and curves. AWD Ariyas can vary motor torque front and rear to control the body's pitch; the front-drive version would benefit from some mitigation strategies, too.

The best part about the Ariya is the latest version of ProPilot Assist. The advanced driver aid confidently holds its line through bends, accelerates and brakes as a human would, and can even change lanes automatically. It's not quite GM's Super Cruise, but it's close.

At this stage, we fear the new Ariya will suffer the same fate as the Leaf before it. In its current state, this remarkably unremarkable electric SUV isn't particularly competitive when it comes to its performance or most of its tech. Even so, it is a stylish and practical electric alternative to EVs like the ID4 and, perhaps more important, mainstream crossovers such as the Toyota RAV4 and Honda CR-V. Ultimately, maybe following in the Leaf's tire tracks isn't such a bad thing—after two generations (and counting) it remains among the bestselling EVs in the world. Perhaps unremarkable is enough, after all.

Christian Seabaugh

2023 Nissan Ariya Empower+

PRICE	$47,125
PRICE AS TESTED	$54,000 (est)
VEHICLE LAYOUT	Front-motor, FWD, 5-pass, 4-door SUV
MOTOR TYPE	Permanent-magnet electric
POWER (SAE NET)	238 hp
TORQUE (SAE NET)	221 lb-ft
TRANSMISSION	1-speed automatic
CURB WEIGHT (F/R DIST)	4,725 lb (53/47%)
WHEELBASE	109.3 in
L X W X H	182.9 x 74.8 x 65.7 in
0-60 MPH	7.5 sec
QUARTER MILE	15.8 sec @ 92.9 mph
BRAKING, 60-0 MPH	128 ft
LATERAL ACCELERATION	0.79 g (avg)
MT FIGURE EIGHT	27.6 sec @ 0.61 g (avg)
EPA CITY/HWY/COMB FUEL ECON	105/91/98 mpg-e
EPA RANGE, COMB	289 miles
ON SALE	Now

Intake

2023 Ram 2500 HD Rebel

FIRST TEST

Sometimes less really is more.

Until now, if you wanted a heavy-duty Ram that was also a turnkey off-roader, your only choice was the Power Wagon. Think of the 2500 Rebel (HD Rebel for short) as Power Wagon Lite. But our testing has proven the HD Rebel is no lightweight—literally or figuratively.

The HD Rebel offers a few important options you can't get on a Power Wagon, including the Cummins 6.7-liter turbodiesel I-6. The Rebel also comes with a set of stiffer springs found on other HD Rams and an optional rear air suspension, so it's better suited for towing and lugging.

We had a chance to do some off-roading with both gas and diesel versions. We thought the diesel would have some advantages, given its low-end torque. But the gas engine proved to be the better choice. We found it way easier to apply power smoothly and gently with the 6.4. With low range engaged, the diesel tended to leap forward with even the lightest touch of the accelerator. The gasser's engine braking was better, too. On the steepest downslopes, we downshifted to low gear, and the Rebel tiptoed down the hill.

We also put the gas-powered model through our performance tests. The truck got itself to 60 mph in 7.5 seconds and through the quarter mile in 15.8 seconds at 88.1 mph. Those aren't great numbers, but they aren't surprising considering the Ram weighs 7,499 pounds. We'll be curious to see how the diesel performs once we have a chance to test it. Yes, it has more torque (850 lb-ft), but judging from the reduced payload, the powertrain adds more than half a ton of weight.

As far as off-road-ready pickups go, the Ram 2500 Rebel is a compelling package. It does most of what the Power Wagon will do in all but the most extreme off-road situations, and it retains the heavy-duty towing and hauling abilities the Power Wagon gives up. The HD Rebel gives us yet another reason to be Ram fans. **Aaron Gold**

2023 Ram 2500 HD Rebel

PRICE	$71,240
PRICE AS TESTED	$85,350
VEHICLE LAYOUT	Front-engine, 4WD, 5-pass, 4-door truck
ENGINE	6.4L port-injected OHV 16-valve 90-degree V-8
POWER (SAE NET)	410 hp @ 5,600 rpm
TORQUE (SAE NET)	429 lb-ft @ 4,000 rpm
TRANSMISSION	8-speed automatic
CURB WEIGHT (F/R DIST)	7,499 lb (57/43%)
WHEELBASE	149.3 in
L X W X H	238.89 x 83.4 x 80.9 in
0-60 MPH	7.5 sec
QUARTER MILE	15.8 sec @ 88.1 mph
BRAKING, 60-0 MPH	144 ft
LATERAL ACCELERATION	0.66 g (avg)
***MT* FIGURE EIGHT**	30.5 sec @ 0.52 g (avg)
EPA CITY/HWY/COMB FUEL ECON	Not rated
EPA RANGE, COMB	Not rated
ON SALE	Now

Rear View

From the *MT* Archive ...

'74 CAMARO/FIREBIRD • COMPACTS • BIG CARS
MOTOR TREND
Europe By Car
The New Healey!
Supertune: Love Bug
75¢
A VERY SPECIAL SECTION
Love and the Automobile

50

FEBRUARY 1973
PRICE: $0.75

Happy Valentine's Day! We looked at the automobile's role in romance, including a few articles—such as "Confessions of a Make-Out Girl"—we'd never publish today. Ford's LTD Brougham edged out Chevrolet's Caprice Classic in our full-size sedan comparison, while AMC's Hornet proved to be more fun than Chevy's Nova and Dodge's Dart Sport. We found the Mercedes 280 to be the most enjoyable Benz since the 190 SL, and we predicted great success for the new Jensen-Healey sports car.

MOTOR TREND
MUSTANG COBRA VS CAMARO Z28

2013 TRUCK OF THE YEAR, PAGE 94
MOTOR TREND
SUPERFLY

30

FEBRUARY 1993
PRICE: $2.95

In a Camaro versus Mustang shootout, the Z28 bested the Cobra. Dodge's Daytona IROC R/T proved to be the quickest front-driver (0–60 in 6.3 seconds), the Mazda RX-7 won our Import Car of the Year, and we drove the Toyota T100, Lexus GS, and Oldsmobile Silhouette minivan.

10

FEBRUARY 2013
PRICE: $4.99

We took the Lamborghini Aventador on an epic 1,300-mile Italy-to-Spain drive inspired by Ernest Hemingway's *Death in the Afternoon*, and Dodge's Ram 1500 won our Truck of the Year trophy. In a comparison test, the Chevy Volt defeated Toyota's plug-in Prius.

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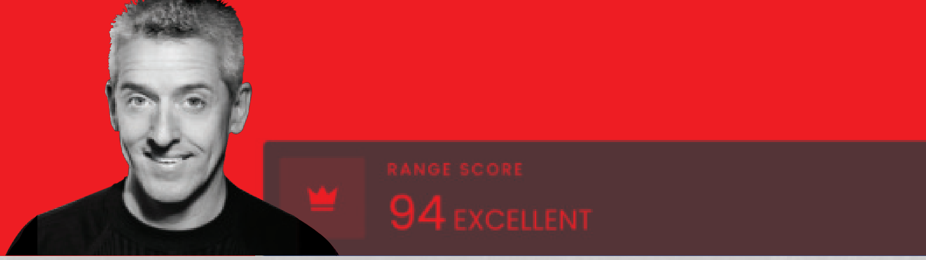
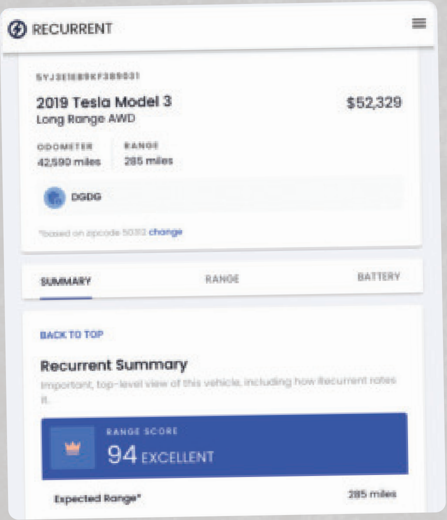
Frank Markus

Technologue



Recurrent Range Score is like CarFax for EV batteries.



The Inflation Reduction Act extends the EV tax credit to certain used vehicles sold through licensed dealers after January 1, 2023. Might an incentive of up to $4,000 sufficiently assuage your fears that a used EV's battery might be compromised by a previous owner fast-charging it too often or maintaining it too near 100 percent charge? Seattle-based Recurrent Motors Inc. is working to build buyer confidence in the health of individual used EV battery packs in much the same way CarFax reports a used car's previous flood or crash damage, rental duty, and maintenance history.

How It Works

EV owners sign up with Recurrent, establishing a telematics link and sharing their EV's vehicle identification number (VIN), from which the company learns the battery chemistry and configuration. Their zip code also suggests the climate it'll operate in. Recurrent then checks in with the vehicle's battery management system three to five times per day, recording odometer mileage, state of charge, estimated range, and charging status. Other battery "life events" are recorded and verified with the owner, such as battery-pack or module replacement. Thus a daily real-world range figure is calculated and compared against the model's ideal original range. Privacy-related data regarding location, speed, etc. is allegedly never recorded.

Original Range—Not EPA Range

As with gas mileage, your new EV's range may vary due to local climate or geographical factors or just because of original-certification politics regarding "adjustment factors." Recurrent strives to establish each specific EV's real-world range when new, against which its subsequent range scoring will forever be compared. This allows the range score of a car driven in Minneapolis to be compared with an identical model used and charged similarly in Phoenix, even if their daily real-world range numbers are quite different.

75 Percent Market Coverage

Recurrent has sufficient data to provide Range Reports on 10 of the highest-volume EVs/PHEVs: Audi E-Tron, BMW i3, Chevy Bolt EV and Volt, Ford Mustang Mach-E, Nissan Leaf, and Tesla Models 3, S, X, and Y. These vehicles account for 75 percent of today's used EV market. And the company has been signing up users of new EV and plug-in hybrid models launched more recently, bringing the data-collection fleet to 50-plus models. Direct reporting on newer models will begin when a critical mass of data is gathered and when those models become more common in used sales. These reports are most accurate for vehicles monitored since new, but artificial intelligence and big-data interpretation fill in gaps reliably.

Free Owner Insight Reports

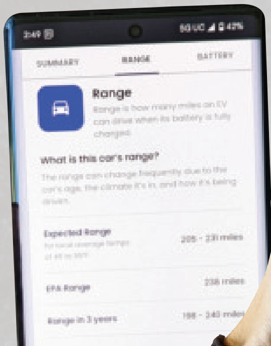
Owners sign up to share battery data for free, and Recurrent in return provides monthly EV wellness reports and maintains a web dashboard showing current range, projected range in three years, market value, a range comparison for similar models, a state-of-charge scatter chart showing how much time the battery has spent in its "sweet spot" (between 30 and 80 percent charge), and more. By monitoring such statistics, owners often modify their habits to prolong battery life. Also free is the Sell With Recurrent feature, which gives EV owners a battery-adjusted valuation and helps connect them with a dealer willing to pay a premium for EVs with verifiably good batteries. VIN-specific reports are also free to prospective buyers.

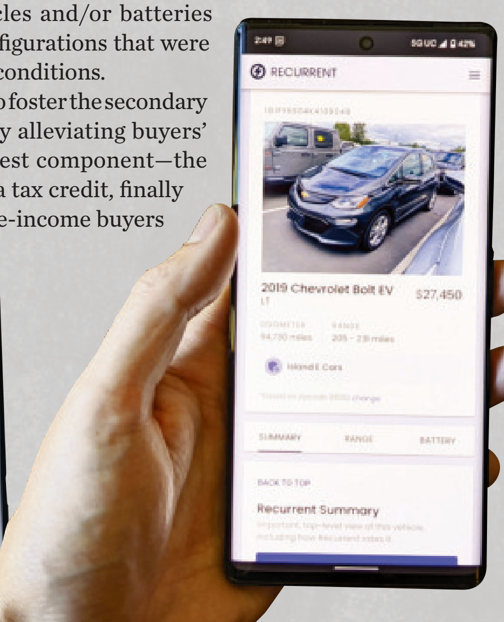
Paid Dealer Recurrent Reports

Dealers are responsible for more than half of all used car sales (a percentage sure to skyrocket among tax-credit-eligible used EVs), so Recurrent generates its revenue by offering CarFax-like battery health reports on used EVs. For those vehicles never registered with Recurrent or for models lacking sufficient real-world data, the VIN is entered along with data about where it was primarily used. A valuation is then generated based on predictive models that interpolate data generated by equivalent vehicles and/or batteries with chemistries and configurations that were monitored under similar conditions.

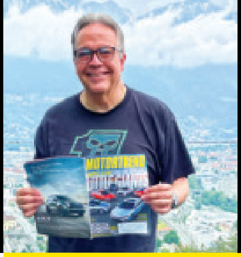
Recurrent's mission is to foster the secondary electric vehicle market by alleviating buyers' fears about an EV's priciest component—the battery. Might that, plus a tax credit, finally entice mainstream middle-income buyers into used EVs? ■

A typical Recurrent Report shows odometer reading (42,590 miles), predicted range (285 miles), and Range Score (94—Excellent) for a 2019 Tesla Model 3. Scrolling down the app's version of the report reveals additional predictions. Recurrent is building confidence in an EV's battery pack the way CarFax reports crash damage and maintenance history.





Your Say ...



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Good Times

I have to give Aaron Gold credit for his article "Escape and Evade" featured in the November issue. I was intrigued and laughing from start to end. It's a very well-written article, and it made me feel like I was there. My 10-year-old son really liked it, too. The best line: "In the event of a nuclear war, my goal is to die in the initial attack." It made me spit out my coffee.

Jonathan Olbert
Via email

Capturing Imaginations

I just bought a lottery ticket, so I would love to see a comparison test of the new Chevrolet Corvette Z06 and Porsche Cayman GT4 RS, as well as read more about other new high-performance cars.

Stephen Comer
Rifle, Colorado

You're going to like our April issue.—Ed.

In your mostly splendid November issue, Jonny Lieberman rhapsodizes about the Lamborghini Countach: "My head was against the roof, no power steering, miserable electric seats, three turns lock to lock, an 80-pound clutch pedal, permanent-fogged windshield, the lack of noticeable brakes ..." I can save him about $200,000 if that's what he wants in his dream car: My 1971 Triumph Spitfire had all that and more. Much, much more.

Kim T. Bené
West Valley City, Utah

Some cars are charmingly flawed. Then there are Triumphs.—Ed.

Maintenance Plan

Miguel Cortina's recent article regarding the need for charging-infrastructure maintenance nailed it. Well done. Given the amount of capital investment in the development of the electric car fleet, you would think more consideration would be afforded to ongoing maintenance of the "new" infrastructure. As the newness of the facilities fades, the system's sustainability is most important. Unfortunately, the fact of the matter is that maintenance is not exciting. Until a truly private/public partnership for ongoing maintenance is developed to support the electrical push, the general public's opinion of EVs will continue to lag.

Stephen R. Pusey
Via email

Reader on Location

Joe Barreto of Hackensack, New Jersey, is this month's Reader on Location. He writes to us from Innsbruck, Austria: "Since I was 10, I always wanted to go to Austria and see where they held the ski jump during the 1976 Olympics. I got to live out my dream 46 years later! This photo was taken at the top of the ski jump, and of course I had my *MotorTrend* magazine along on the trip. It truly was a rush to experience this!" *If you'd like to be featured in Reader on Location, email MotorTrend@MotorTrend.com with a high-resolution picture and a brief summary of your trip.*

Not Feeling Electric

Why do you continue to support such a failure of a vehicle like an electric truck, such as the Ford Lightning, or anything else for that matter? Nothing will ever beat a fuel-powered vehicle! I never thought *MotorTrend* would end up being such a woke publication. Global warming is a hoax and has been proven so. There's no carbon issue; it's called another fear and control tactic. You clowns need to wake up. Perhaps watch the *Mad Max* series, and you'll know what is coming!

David Burgenmeyer
Via email

You might want to watch those movies a little more closely. What do you think they're fighting over?—Ed.

The Kids Are All Right

I am an eighth-grader from Arizona, and I am interested in writing for *MotorTrend*. I love cars, have a news writing job, and I love to write. Writing for *MT* would be a dream job. I'll take any article as long as it doesn't require me to travel or drive a car, and I do not expect any payment. Seeing my article on the website or in the magazine is reward enough.

[name redacted]

We don't publish minors' names, and we know that's likely a disappointment, but keep writing about what you love. Many can drive well, but few have the talent to write coherently and logically. Sounds like you're on the right path!—Ed.

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ACT THREE

HENRIK FISKER'S NEW OCEAN EV MAY FINALLY REALIZE HIS DREAM

WORDS ANGUS MACKENZIE
PHOTOGRAPHY WILLIAM WALKER

Scott Fitzgerald once wrote there were no second acts in American lives. Nobody told Henrik Fisker. The Danish-born, Los Angeles–based car designer turned entrepreneur is now on his third attempt at building cars with his family name on the hood. In his early favor, our drive of a prototype of the electric-powered Fisker Ocean SUV, which should hit streets sometime in late 2023, suggests he might finally have a winner.

At first acquaintance, the Ocean is a cool, classy, competent take on what is quickly becoming the planet's hottest vehicle segment: the midsize electric-powered SUV. More important, though, behind this new Fisker EV is a manufacturing infrastructure with a proven track record in building everything from sports cars to sedans to luxury off-roaders in high volumes and to high quality standards.

Every EV startup, even those well-funded and staffed with talented executives, has discovered that designing and engineering a groundbreaking new EV is, relatively speaking, the easy bit. Building them is a whole different ball game. "It's maybe 100 times harder to design the manufacturing system than the car itself," Tesla boss Elon Musk has acknowledged as Tesla struggles to improve quality at its plants. And he's not alone. Both Rivian and Lucid have grappled with problems that have slowed production.

Fisker's secret sauce is Magna Steyr, an automotive manufacturer based in Graz, Austria. Magna who? You may not know much about this company, a subsidiary of Canadian auto supplier Magna International, but you're familiar with what it builds: the Mercedes-Benz G-Class, Jaguar I-Pace, BMW 5 Series sedan, BMW Z4, and Toyota Supra. Indeed, Magna is an experienced, flexible, and efficient auto manufacturing specialist. And it's invested in making the Ocean a success, literally: The company has taken a 6 percent stake in Fisker Inc.

Although Fisker stock has been on a wild ride since the company was

Henrik Fisker built his reputation designing high-end cars. His latest project, the Ocean SUV, is no econobox, either, but its sub-$40,000 base price puts it firmly in the mainstream.

floated—at the time of writing, it was trading at less than a third of its February 2021 peak—it's an investment that could pay big dividends for Magna. "I think today we are a $2.5 billion company," Fisker says, pointing out Rivian and Lucid, despite significant cuts to their production forecasts, are worth about $30 billion and $24 billion, respectively. "Magna might make more money on that stake than it actually makes on the cars it builds for us."

That, of course, depends entirely on whether the Fisker Ocean is a success. Let's take a closer look at the car itself before we climb behind the wheel.

The Ocean is built on Fisker's own platform co-developed with Magna and code-named FM29. The name comes from the wheelbase, which is 2,920mm, or 115.0 inches. It's a conventional skateboard design with struts up front and a multilink rear suspension, and room for a motor at each axle.

Fisker initially looked at basing the Ocean off Volkswagen's MEB electric vehicle platform, but the German automaker proved frustratingly slow to deal with, he says. There were other issues, too. "Quite frankly, we couldn't get the proportions we wanted with MEB," Fisker adds. "With Magna we saw an opportunity to actually say: 'OK, we can really set the stage. I can make the wheelbase the way I want. I can do the track the way I want, the height, the front windscreen, all the proportions just right.'"

There was one other big advantage in doing a bespoke platform. "We own the intellectual property," Fisker says.

Base-model single-motor Oceans will be front-wheel drive. In the dual-motor versions, the rear motor declutches under certain conditions to save energy. Magna builds the motors to Fisker's specifics, and each develops a peak of 275 hp.

Fisker will offer two chemistries from Chinese battery specialist CATL, one focused on price, the other on performance. The base battery is a lithium-iron-phosphate (LFP) unit that will be available only in the front-drive Ocean Sport. Other Ocean models will get CATL's better-performing and more expensive nickel-manganese-cobalt-oxide (NMC) battery, which boasts a capacity of more than 100 kWh and can charge from 10 to 80 percent in less than 35 minutes. The Ocean's 400-volt electrical architecture will support vehicle-to-vehicle and vehicle-to-grid charging. Battery choice will be the fundamental differentiator between Ocean models in terms of range and performance, and because batteries are expensive, that's reflected in the price.

The 275-hp entry-level single-motor front-drive Ocean Sport is expected to list from $39,000. For that you get the LFP Touring Range battery Fisker says will deliver an estimated EPA range of 250 miles. The least expensive of the dual-motor models, the $49,999 Ocean Ultra, boasts a total of 540 hp and is expected to deliver 340 miles of range on the NMC battery dubbed Hyper Range.

This isn't Fisker's first foray into building cars, but his ambitious scale surpasses his previous ventures.

Revised software means the top-of-the-range $68,999 Ocean Extreme's Hyper Range battery will take it 10 miles farther between charges than the Ocean Ultra, and it will get there quicker courtesy of its performance-focused 550-hp powertrain. Fisker claims a 0–60 acceleration time of about 3.6 seconds and a top speed of 130 mph. The Extreme also comes with solar roof panels Fisker says can provide 1,500 to 2,000 miles' worth of range per year.

The first 5,000 cars off the line will all be badged Ocean One. They are essentially Ocean Extremes fitted with one of the two optional 22-inch wheel designs and performance tires. (All Oceans come standard with 20-inch wheels and bespoke range-focused tires developed by Bridgestone.) They also get the MaliBlu dark blue interior at no extra cost. All will have a "digital signature" in the vehicle information menu to authenticate their place among the first 5,000 electric vehicles made by Fisker.

Bodywork teased out over a wide track, and big wheels right at the car's corners, make the Ocean look smaller than it is. Measuring 188.0 inches long, 75.8 inches wide, and 64.2 inches tall, the Fisker is slightly longer, wider, and taller than a Ford Mustang Mach-E, a Tesla Model Y, or our 2023 *MotorTrend* SUV of the Year, the Hyundai Ioniq 5. Its 115.0-inch wheelbase is 1.2 inches longer than the Tesla's but 2.5 inches shorter than the Mustang's and 3.1 inches shorter than the Hyundai's. However, the rear seat will happily accommodate 6-foot-tall adults. There's no frunk for storage—that space is full of motor and inverters and other electric-powertrain hardware—and the rear load area is adequate rather than capacious.

The interior vibe is minimalist, with even the audio system speakers hidden, though its cleanly rendered forms and sophisticated materials mean it's nowhere near as grimly drab as that of a Tesla. A small screen behind the steering wheel gives the driver all the key pieces of information needed while driving.

The main user interface is a giant 17.1-inch touchscreen at the center of the dash that, when the Ocean is parked, can rotate from portrait to landscape format to enable video viewing in all its widescreen glory. Intelligently, Fisker resisted the temptation to make the screen lord and master of everything the Ocean does: A row of buttons located in a fixed structure

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below the rotating screen controls the air conditioning settings. There are also buttons for the lights and e-brake, and a stalk controls the windshield wipers.

We drove a pre-production prototype Ocean Extreme, which meant it had the 550-hp dual-motor powertrain, optional 22-inch Air Glider wheels, and 255/45 Bridgestone performance tires. Though well worn and rough around the edges—as all prototypes tend to be at this stage of development—and still awaiting software calibrations, it was nonetheless close to final spec in terms of the powertrain and suspension tune.

As you'd expect, with 550 hp and instant-on torque, the Ocean feels quick off the line, speed building with the silent, elastic surge that makes EVs so addictive in traffic. The steel-sprung suspension keeps a tight rein on wayward body motions; roll, dive, and squat are well controlled, but not at the expense of the rolling ride. Road and wind noise levels are low.

Unlike many other dual-motor EVs, the Ocean feels noticeably front-drive biased, understeering in tighter corners when you go to power, with some torque steer evident under hard straight-line acceleration. A little more rear bias, easily done with a software change or two, would dial up the fun factor for twisty bits of road. The braking needs work, as well. The pedal travel is too long, and there's too much delay before the accelerator responds after braking inputs.

Fisker also could take a little more weight out of the steering to enhance the decent feel from the front axle. And the steering wheel needs a redesign, as the multiaxis touchpanels on the spokes are too easy to inadvertently activate with the palms of your hands.

Pleasingly, the Ocean drives smaller and lighter than expected; it doesn't feel like a lumbering SUV with a big battery in its belly. Intriguingly, when asked, Fisker engineers smilingly declined to say how much the Ocean weighs, which suggests their extensive use of aluminum and plastics—the front fenders and rear quarter panels are plastic, for example—has paid significant dividends.

At first acquaintance, the 2023 Fisker Ocean looks set to ruffle a few feathers in the midsize electric SUV segment. The $39,000 entry-level Ocean Sport undercuts even the base Hyundai Ioniq 5 by about $3,000, and if Fisker's estimates stand up to EPA testing, it will offer 13 percent more range in the bargain. Ford's cheapest Mustang Mach-E, the Select with the standard-range battery, boasts similar power and range numbers as the Ocean Sport but costs some $9,000 more.

2023 Fisker Ocean

PRICE	$39,000–$70,500 (est)
LAYOUT	Fr- or fr/rr-motor, FWD/ AWD, 5-pass, 4-door SUV
MOTORS	275-hp/278-lb-ft; 540–550-hp/556-lb-ft permanent-magnet-type electric
TRANSMISSION(S)	1-speed automatic
CURB WEIGHT	4,500 lb (*MT* est)
WHEELBASE	115.0 in
L X W X H	188.0 x 78.5 x 64.2 in
0-60 MPH	3.6 sec (mfr, Extreme)
EPA CITY/HWY/ COMB FUEL ECON	Not yet rated
EPA RANGE (COMB)	250–350 miles (est)
ON SALE	Fall 2023

At the lineup's top end, the Ocean Extreme costs nearly the same as a Tesla Model Y Performance (which is about $69,990 before factoring in any incentives) but offers similar actual performance and is expected to deliver more than 15 percent better range. But the Extreme is nearly $7,000 cheaper than the similarly quick Mustang Mach-E Performance Edition and should have 34 percent better range.

The real bang-for-your-buck Fisker looks to be the $50,500 mid-spec Ocean Ultra. If Fisker's range claims are accurate, it should go 31 percent farther than a $57,795 Ioniq 5 Limited AWD, 10 percent farther than a $64,190 Model Y Long Range, and 30 percent farther than a $71,195 Mach-E GT between charges. And with 540 hp on tap, it should accelerate quicker to 60 mph than either the Hyundai or the Tesla and right on par with the Mach-E GT.

Competitive pricing is only part of the story. From the fourth quarter of 2023 Fisker plans to offer a flexible lease that will allow customers to return their Ocean at any time. In fact, the company plans to eventually offer Oceans only via lease. "We're going to own the vehicle until the end of its life, 12 years, and recycle it," Fisker says. "You can lease and hand it back any time you want."

Customers leasing older used Oceans will be offered software-based functionality upgrades, for a fee, a strategy Fisker believes will unlock more value for the company over the vehicle's lifetime than is normally extracted via servicing and maintenance. "We'll make more than three times the profit margin over 12 years versus a one-time sale," he says.

Finally, Fisker says the company has 60,000 Ocean preorders, including 5,000 prepaid deposits of $5,250 for the limited-edition Ocean One, and early off-tool cars are already rolling off the Magna Steyr assembly line. In 2023, the first full year of production, he expects the company to deliver 40,000 to 50,000 total vehicles to the U.S., Europe, and Asia. ■

The Ocean is Fisker's first model, but it won't be the last. Details are scarce, but expect four more vehicles by 2025.

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NEVER MIND THE HORSEPOWER, FEEL THE HANDLING

The horsepower war is over. The handling war is on. Cars like the Audi RS 5 Coupe and Sportback with the Competition Plus package and Porsche's stunning new GT3 RS—vehicles we've driven in just the past few months—suggest a paradigm shift is coming in the performance car business.

In an era when modern EV technology means pretty much anyone can build a 2,000-horsepower car that will launch so hard it'll shred your intestines on the way to an insanely quick 0–60 time, developing internal combustion engines that pump out ever more power to deliver marginal improvements in acceleration times and top speed is increasingly a zero-sum game.

But building a road car chassis with hardware and software that allow enthusiastic and engaged drivers to be whole seconds faster around a racetrack than their rivals? That's a more complex skill set. Which perhaps explains this emerging focus from brands keen to polish their performance credentials on chassis tuning that delivers driving precision and driver exhilaration in equal measure.

The 2023 Lamborghini Urus Performante, scheduled to arrive in the U.S. before the end of 2022 and priced from $260,676, is the newest harbinger of this trend.

The Urus Performante's 4.0-liter twin-turbo V-8 develops just 16 more horsepower than the regular Urus powerplant and the same torque. Yet it's three-tenths of a second quicker to 60 mph and 1.3 seconds quicker to 124 mph than the regular Urus, which has more to do with its slight reduction in weight, better traction, quicker and smoother gearshifts, and improved aerodynamics.

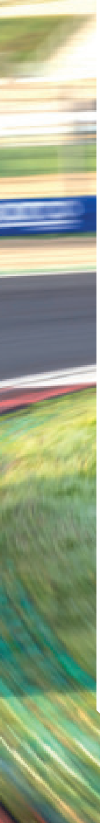
The whole point of the Urus Performante is not how much faster it is than the regular Urus in a straight line, though; it's how much quicker it is

WORDS ANGUS MACKENZIE

Creating a world-class track SUV is far more challenging than building one that's merely fast in a straight line. Lamborghini put in the work, and behind the wheel, it shows.

IT WEIGHS 4,750 POUNDS, BUT THE URUS FEELS ALMOST AS PLAYFUL AS A WRX.

Engineers focused on the chassis with one goal: Go around a racetrack quicker.



through the corners. "The mission was to make this the best driver's car in the segment," Lamborghini chief technical officer Rouven Mohr said. "And that was about how the car involves the driver in the driving experience."

That's why Lamborghini spent most of the Urus Performante's engineering development budget on the chassis. The first step was to ditch the height-adjustable air suspension in the regular Urus in favor of steel springs and magnetorheological shocks whose compression and rebound rates can be made softer or firmer depending on which drive mode you select.

Why? "In air suspension you have rubber and compressed air, so you have nonlinearities in the way the suspension behaves," Mohr said. "With steel springs, you always have predictable, linear behavior." And that means the shocks can be precisely tuned to enhance the superior body control the steel springs deliver, and the car can be fitted with tires that respond much more quickly to lateral inputs and loads.

"There are no race cars on the planet with air suspension because from the dynamic point of view, it's not the right choice," said Mohr, who has a Ph.D. in numerical mechanics and a delectable fleet of performance machinery in his personal garage, and who used to build and drive drift cars for fun. "If you speak about the best interaction of the car with the driver from a sporty point of view, there is no way around steel suspension."

The steel-sprung Urus Performante rides 0.8 inch lower than the air-suspended Urus in its default ride height, and its track is 0.6 inch wider. The active anti-roll system carries over from the standard Urus but is tuned to take advantage of the greater precision of the steel-spring suspension, as are the rear-wheel steering and torque-vectoring systems.

The massive 17.3-inch front, 14.6-inch rear carbon-ceramic brakes are unchanged, but the Urus Performante's standard 22-inch wheels can be fitted with a new, grippier high-performance Pirelli P Zero Trofeo R tire—285/40 up front and 325/35 at the rear—that's been specially developed for the car and is available as an option. Sharp-eyed enthusiasts will be able to spot the go-fast poseurs by the optional 23-inch wheels on their Urus Performantes: Those heavier rims are not available with Trofeo R tires.

As before, the 4.0-liter twin-turbo V-8, which makes 657 hp at 6,000 rpm and 627 lb-ft of torque from 2,300 rpm to 4,500 rpm, drives through an eight-speed automatic transmission. However, the transmission is reprogrammed to be smoother and more responsive, especially in manual mode, and sends drive to all four wheels through a Torsen center

differential set up to send more torque to the rear axle under acceleration.

Lamborghini design chief Mitja Borkert gave the Urus Performante a visual makeover, but it's not simply intended to make Sant'Agata Bolognese's scowling super SUV look even more like Darth Vader in a bad mood. A redesigned front bumper features a larger splitter and new intakes to improve cooling and help create an air curtain over the front wheels. Vents in the reprofiled hood help reduce air pressure in the engine compartment. The new rear bumper has vents behind the rear wheels and a new diffuser layout between the bazooka-caliber quad exhausts, and a rear wing extends from the roof over the backlight.

The Performante's new hood is made of carbon fiber, part of a weight-reduction program that includes a titanium

ANIMA
STRADA
SPORT
CORSA
RALLY
P
R
N
D
START
STOP

exhaust, lightweight interior trim, forged aluminum wheels, and an optional carbon-fiber roof. The Viper Green shown here is the hero color, though Lamborghini will paint your Performante pretty much any shade you desire. The visible carbon-fiber treatment on the hood is an option.

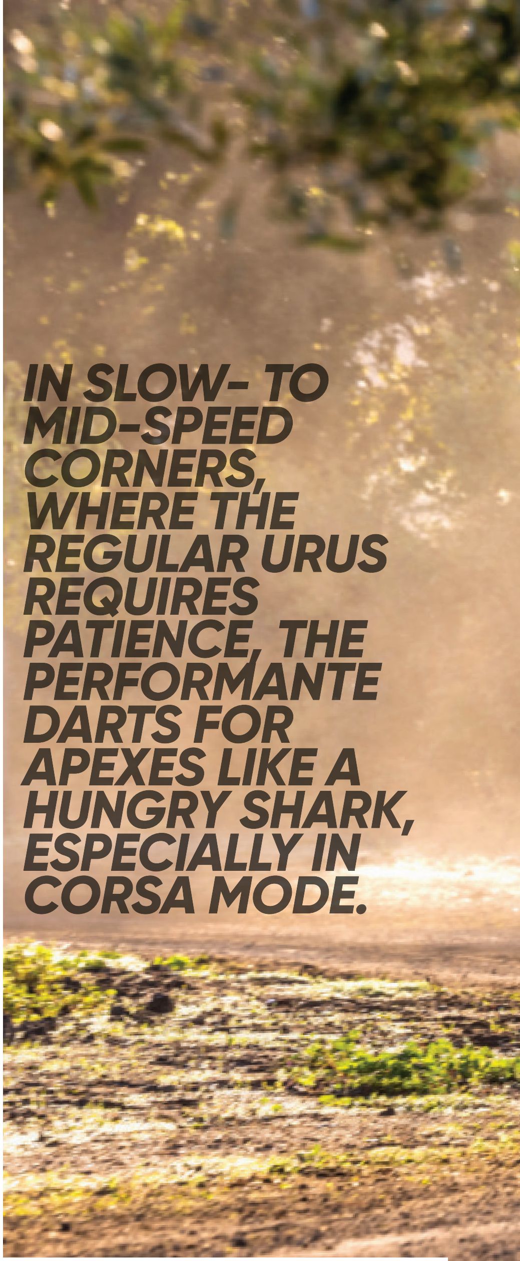
Inside, black Alcantara with a new hexagonal stitching design on the seats is standard, and leather is available. Other options include the extension of the Performante trim on the doors, roof lining, and seat backrests, as well as matte carbon fiber and red door handles.

Mohr said the chassis hardware and software changes deliver a 5 percent improvement in both steering response and grip levels, the styling changes bring a 10 percent improvement in aerodynamic efficiency and a 38 percent increase in rear axle downforce, and the lightweight components trim 103 pounds from the overall mass. These may not sound like big numbers. But they add up to a Urus that indeed feels much more driver-focused, as we discovered on the fast yet technical 2.5-mile Autodromo Vallelunga, 20 miles north of Rome.

Through Vallelunga's slow- to mid-speed corners, where the regular Urus requires patience, preferring you to wash off speed before committing to the turn, the Urus Performante darts for apexes like a hungry shark, especially in Corsa mode, which dials up all the car's chassis and drivetrain systems to DEFCON 1 and dials back interventions from the stability control.

Such is the front end's rapid and concise turn-in response that it's hard to believe the Performante is built on the same engine-forward, nose-heavy Volkswagen Group architecture that also underpins Bentley's Bentayga. Want to tighten your line? Lift off the gas, and the big Lambo will pivot obediently, the tail's lateral acceleration caught easily with a touch of countersteer and throttle. Spotted your exit point? Punch the gas, and feel the rear tires hook up and launch the Performante out of the corner.

Although it's big and tall and still weighs more than 4,700 pounds, the Urus Performante feels almost as playful as a Subaru WRX through Vallelunga's twisties. Elsewhere, at higher speeds, the Lamborghini stays flat and sticks hard, even as it storms through the compression in the middle of the daunting fifth-gear right-hander called Curva Grande. The absence of roll, dive, squat, or diagonal pitch is utterly remarkable.



IN SLOW- TO MID-SPEED CORNERS, WHERE THE REGULAR URUS REQUIRES PATIENCE, THE PERFORMANTE DARTS FOR APEXES LIKE A HUNGRY SHARK, ESPECIALLY IN CORSA MODE.

We didn't get the chance to drive the Urus Performante on the rough-and-tumble roads around Vallelunga, but even on the track it's clear that in Corsa mode the suspension feels very tight—too tight, perhaps—for regular road work. Tooling back to the pits with the car set in the regular Strada mode suggests, as in the regular Urus, the long wheelbase and wide track will calm primary ride motions, and the comfy, supportive seats will soak up most of the secondary ride jitters.

Rally mode is new for the Performante. It specifically sets up the chassis to enable the SUV to dance down a gravel road like a rally racer. Among other things, the shocks' damping and compression rates are softened below those of the Strada setting. This allows the Performante to move on its springs much more to help initiate cornering response and enhance traction on loose and rough surfaces.

If you're used to pitching a Subaru sideways on gravel or snow, you'll notice a little

Is it really an SUV if it can't go off-road? And is it really a Lamborghini if it can't do it quickly? With the Urus Performante, you need not worry about those questions.

2023 Lamborghini Urus Performante

PRICE	$260,676
LAYOUT	Front-engine, AWD, 5-pass, 4-door SUV
ENGINE	4.0L/657-hp/627-lb-ft twin-turbo direct-injected DOHC 32-valve V-8
TRANSMISSION	8-speed automatic
CURB WEIGHT	4,750 lb (mfr)
WHEELBASE	118.3 in
L X W X H	202.2 x 79.8 x 63.7 in
0-60 MPH	3.3 sec (mfr est)
EPA CITY/HWY/ COMB FUEL ECON	14/19/16 mpg
EPA RANGE (COMB)	359 miles
ON SALE	Now

Performante

extra movement from the Performante's rear, rotating farther than you perhaps wanted or needed. That's the rear-wheel steering and torque vectoring at work. They're designed to help drivers who continue to turn into a corner when their car starts to slide rather than opening the steering as they go to power, Mohr said.

"If the car understands they want to initiate a drift, then they only need to be brave and push the throttle," he said. "The rest is managed by the car. If you are a pro driver and you are trained to drift in cars without control systems, then you have to rethink a little bit."

Few owners will ever dream of cosplaying Colin McRae down a forest track. But Rally mode gives them bragging rights their buddies driving Aston Martin DBX707s or the heavy-hitter Porsche Cayennes (page 42) don't have: "Dude! No Rally mode in that thing? Seriously?!"

OK, Rally mode is a bit of a gimmick, but it doesn't detract from the essential truth that defines the Performante: It has a mere 15 more horses under the hood than the regular Urus, but it's up to 3.5 seconds quicker around Vallelunga. About 1.5 seconds of that is down to the Trofeo R tires, Mohr said. The rest is the chassis hardware and software improvements.

Best of all, the driver is at the core of that performance delta. Support technologies will help you out when needed, but the fundamental chassis setup allows drivers of all abilities to explore their own limits—and the car's—with confidence. Sure, it'll take more effort to match a pro driver's time on a track than in a straight line, where these days equaling the factory 0–60 number requires little more than mashing the gas and holding on. But surely that's the whole point of driving?

"More power is not always more fun," Mohr said. The Urus Performante proves the point. It only has a little more power than the regular Urus, but it's a whole lot more rewarding to drive. ■

ABSOLUTE

ASTON MARTIN'S DBX707 AND PORSCHE'S CAYENNE TURBO GT BLUR THE LINE BETWEEN SUV AND FANTASY

For about two years, we could easily say Lamborghini's Urus was the world's best-driving super-SUV. There really wasn't any competition. With around 100 more horsepower than the Porsche Cayenne Turbo, plus shockingly great on- and off-road performance, the Urus was the king of high-performance SUVs.

Then three things happened.

First, Porsche launched the Cayenne Turbo GT. It's not a real "GT division" car because it wasn't fully developed by Porsche's crack Weissach-based motorsports team. But it does have an ever so slightly different version of the Urus' 4.0-liter twin-turbo V-8, which was in fact developed by the Weissach folks. Confusing, we know. And this Cayenne can boogie, so much so that it still holds the Nürburgring SUV lap record of 7 minutes, 38.9 seconds.

Next came the also unbelievably great-to-drive Aston Martin DBX707, a hopped-up high-po version of the pretty good DBX. What a fantastic three-way comparison this would have been. However, the third thing that transpired is that this past November, Lamborghini shuttered regular Urus production to ready its factory for both the new Urus S and the Urus Performante (page 36), but neither launched in time for our showdown. As such, this test is a regular old two-way affair. Well, "regular" is a silly word when talking about beasts such as these, with a combined 1,328 hp. Let's forget for just a moment the obvious question—who on earth needs these things?—and instead find out which of these SUVs is superest.

These two seem mostly even. Not identical, but for every spec or stat where the Porsche noses ahead, the Aston has one that reels it back in. For example, the DBX707 makes 697 hp from its AMG-sourced, Aston-tuned 4.0-liter twin-turbo V-8. ("707" refers to metric ponies.) Compare that to just 631 from the Cayenne GT's 4.0-liter twin-turbo V-8.

4.0
TWIN TURBO
V8

With the $290,086 Aston Martin and $197,010 Porsche, you're looking at nearly half a million dollars in SUVs. For that kind of scratch, we'd pick a more exciting color.

UNITS

WORDS JONNY LIEBERMAN
PHOTOGRAPHY POVI PULLINEN

Porsche has done next to nothing inside to distinguish the Turbo GT from lesser Cayennes—unfortunate at this price.

The Germanic Brit also wins the torque battle, with 663 lb-ft versus 626. However, the Porsche has a sportier steering ratio, at 12.2:1 against 14.4:1, and even more preposterous front brake rotors that measure 17.3 inches in diameter as opposed to 16.5. And on it goes: The Porsche is 143 pounds lighter but only seats four, whereas the Aston Martin has a noticeably larger rear seat in terms of head- and legroom and can accommodate five people.

What about performance? Almost a dead heat, until it isn't. The Cayenne Turbo GT is just a tick quicker than the DBX707: The Porsche hits 60 mph in 3.0 seconds, and the Aston does so in 3.1. The Porsche runs the quarter mile in 11.3 seconds at 121.0 mph, and the Aston needs 11.4, but the latter is traveling a slightly faster 121.6 mph. Everything else being equal, more horsepower equals a higher trap speed. However, the Aston—despite its extra weight and smaller brakes—anchors itself from 60 mph to a dead stop in just 102 feet. The Porsche needs 105. Those distances are remarkable for such heavy vehicles. For context, an Acura NSX Type S requires 103 feet to halt from 60.

The Porsche is in another class dynamically, however. It pulls 1.07 g on our skidpad, which should be its own news item. The Aston manages 0.98 g, which is still great for an SUV, just not as newsworthy. Not to pick on the poor Acura NSX any more (1.03 g, if you're interested), but just for the record, the Lamborghini Urus pulls 1.01 g.

Even more impressive is the Porsche's figure-eight performance, where it laid down a 23.2-second lap (tying the Acura and beating the BMW M5 CS!), compared to 24.1 for the Aston Martin. To contextualize that a bit, we've long maintained any figure-eight time in the 22-second range is a bona fide supercar. This here Cayenne is dang close. To further contextualize the figure-eight performance, the Urus put up a 23.5-second time, the Cadillac CT5-V Blackwing 23.4 seconds. The Porsche is an animal.

So that's it, right? The Cayenne Turbo GT dusts not only the Aston Martin but every other SUV ever made, end of story? Unlike these two monster SUVs, not so fast. First, we need to talk about money. Replicating this Porsche will cost you $197,010. That's a pile of cash, until you realize the Aston Martin's as-tested price is $290,086, or $93,076 more. With all this in mind, on a pleasant September morning, yours truly and associate editor Duncan Brady headed off into the canyons above Los Angeles to figure out which of these two would take the crown.

The first thing we did when we met up on the mountain was park and just look at our duo. An easy, overwhelming win for Aston Martin. I'm getting sick of writing it, and he's probably both annoyed and secretly thrilled I keep saying it, but Aston VP of design Marek Reichman is the best designer in the business. Say whatever else you want about Astons, they're beautiful. Most SUVs? Bad-looking. The DBX, especially in 707 trim? We dig it. You can get overly granular and say something like, "I don't like the ducktail." I promise you, five seconds comparing the DBX707's

Part athletic shoe, part old Mercedes, the DBX707's cabin is an exciting place to be. It reminds you why you spent so much.

rear to virtually every other SUV, and it's a breath of fresh air.

The only weak spot we detect on the Aston is the relative size of the brakes to the wheels. "I wish the rotors filled out the wheels better," Brady said. "As it sits, the 23-inch rear wheels and comparatively small 15.4-inch rear discs give off that F-150 on 24s look." Both cars arrived wearing white paint, but the DBX707 looks spectacular even in Star Wars stormtrooper spec, especially next to the Porsche, which looks like a white potato.

Although we're aware of and embracing our electric future, a great gas-burning powerplant is special. "God, this engine is a beast," Brady said of the Aston's eight-cylinder. "It's raw and manic and unhinged, both in its sound and power delivery." I concur. There's a surge and a ferocity and a growl that conspire to put a big, dumb smile on your face. And unlike the Porsche, you can feel the Aston's engine getting stronger as speed builds. It's a bit strange that, with the exception of the flat-plane-crank version of AMG's V-8 in the GT Black Series, this is the most powerful iteration.

It's worth pointing out the DBX707 was developed while former AMG boss Tobias Moers was CEO of the company, and now he's not. Should we be worried about future Aston engines? Naw, as not only will the marque go mostly EV by 2025, but we've also been assured the flat-plane-crank AMG V-8 in the Valhalla hybrid supercar will make more than 800 hp.

As smitten as we were with the Aston's engine, the ZF eight-speed transmission in the Porsche beats the Mercedes-sourced nine-speed unit in the Aston Martin. "This transmission's shift logic is not

Beauty is often in the eye of the beholder. Here, beauty is in the design of the Aston Martin DBX707.

as sophisticated as the Porsche's when driving quickly," Brady said. "It was downshifting unnecessarily and upshifting too early." Of course, that's when left in full auto. Start shifting yourself, and the two gearboxes feel roughly like equals, but the Aston's large carbon-fiber paddles are a world better. Brady again: "This is what I imagine a race car's shifters feel like to use." You'll notice both super-SUVs use a conventional automatic as opposed to a dual-clutch unit. This is fine, as neither needs to go quicker, and when you're not attacking a back road, both are comfortable cruisers. No herky-jerky starts here.

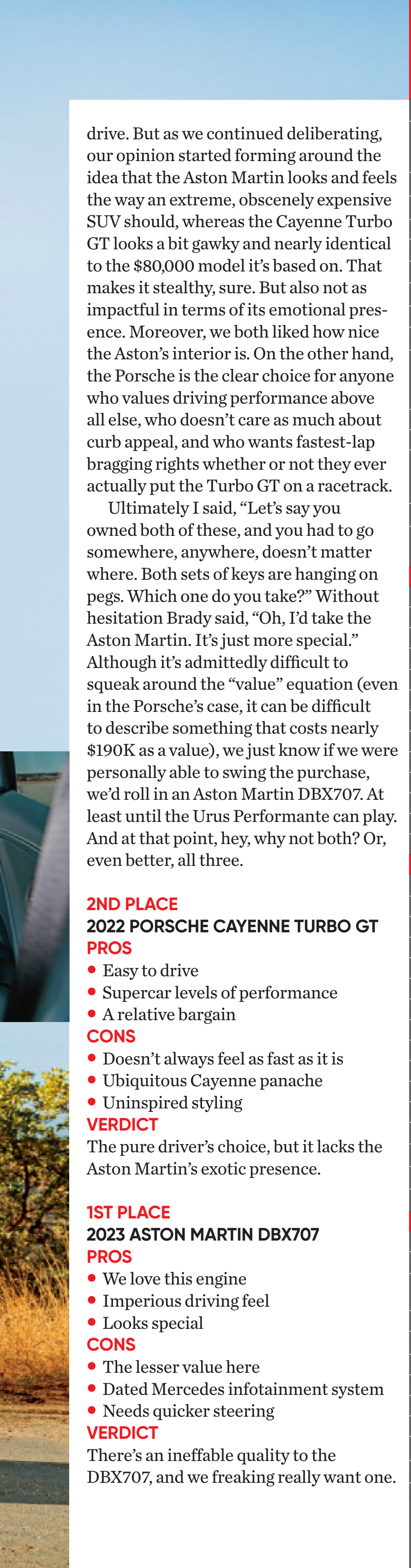
Because you're not doing standing-start launches on a canyon drive, we both thought the DBX707 was the quicker machine. This could be simply because it's louder and sounds better. When it came to tackling corners, however, the Porsche had the advantage, though perhaps not as large as the test numbers might suggest. Brady agreed, saying of the 707, "The steering is just as direct and accurate as the Turbo GT's but perhaps with a thin layer of insulation the Cayenne doesn't have."

The Aston gets bunched up in tighter corners, where it works itself through well enough; it's just not clever about it. On long sweepers, the DBX707 comes alive. There's suddenly an elegance to its movements, a reason for its admittedly preposterous existence. Dare we call it regal? It's also around the bigger corners where the powertrain's massive brawn shows itself. Again, 697 hp is a great amount of shove, and the engine displays no signs of strain well into triple-digit speed. The brakes are very effective, though the feel is not as confidence-inspiring as the Cayenne GT's. But that's an industry-wide problem Porsche is almost single-handedly solving.

The Turbo GT manages to drive smaller. Perhaps that sounds preposterous when talking about a 5,000-pound SUV, but it feels like the nimbler vehicle. Perhaps it's the quicker steering rack? It feels like less work to get the Cayenne Turbo GT around the same corners. Conversely, that makes it seem more boring, less exciting to drive than the 707. Granted, you don't work too hard in the DBX, either, but at least there's some physicality to it, some type of theater. The Porsche is more buttoned down, more unflappable. The latter also has a tire advantage over the Aston Martin—Pirelli P Zero Corsas to plain old P Zeros—and the British SUV suffers a bit more understeer as a result. Driving them both on the same rubber would be interesting.

Brady and I stood around trying to solve the riddle of which is the better SUV for much longer than is typical in these types of tests. We saw it two ways. First, the Aston doesn't substantively justify its $93K premium, especially considering its infotainment system is old Mercedes stuff. The Porsche is also slightly better to

ON LONG SWEEPERS, THE DBX707 COMES ALIVE. DARE WE CALL IT REGAL?



drive. But as we continued deliberating, our opinion started forming around the idea that the Aston Martin looks and feels the way an extreme, obscenely expensive SUV should, whereas the Cayenne Turbo GT looks a bit gawky and nearly identical to the $80,000 model it's based on. That makes it stealthy, sure. But also not as impactful in terms of its emotional presence. Moreover, we both liked how nice the Aston's interior is. On the other hand, the Porsche is the clear choice for anyone who values driving performance above all else, who doesn't care as much about curb appeal, and who wants fastest-lap bragging rights whether or not they ever actually put the Turbo GT on a racetrack.

Ultimately I said, "Let's say you owned both of these, and you had to go somewhere, anywhere, doesn't matter where. Both sets of keys are hanging on pegs. Which one do you take?" Without hesitation Brady said, "Oh, I'd take the Aston Martin. It's just more special." Although it's admittedly difficult to squeak around the "value" equation (even in the Porsche's case, it can be difficult to describe something that costs nearly $190K as a value), we just know if we were personally able to swing the purchase, we'd roll in an Aston Martin DBX707. At least until the Urus Performante can play. And at that point, hey, why not both? Or, even better, all three.

2ND PLACE

2022 PORSCHE CAYENNE TURBO GT

PROS

- Easy to drive
- Supercar levels of performance
- A relative bargain

CONS

- Doesn't always feel as fast as it is
- Ubiquitous Cayenne panache
- Uninspired styling

VERDICT

The pure driver's choice, but it lacks the Aston Martin's exotic presence.

1ST PLACE

2023 ASTON MARTIN DBX707

PROS

- We love this engine
- Imperious driving feel
- Looks special

CONS

- The lesser value here
- Dated Mercedes infotainment system
- Needs quicker steering

VERDICT

There's an ineffable quality to the DBX707, and we freaking really want one.

POWERTRAIN/CHASSIS	2023 Aston Martin DBX707	2022 Porsche Cayenne Turbo GT Coupe
DRIVETRAIN LAYOUT	Front-engine, AWD	Front-engine, AWD
ENGINE TYPE	Twin-turbo direct-injected DOHC 32-valve 90-degree V-8, alum block/heads	Twin-turbo direct-injected DOHC 32-valve 90-degree V-8, alum block/heads
DISPLACEMENT	3,982cc/243.0 cu in	3,996cc/243.9 cu in
COMPRESSION RATIO	8.6:1	9.7:1
POWER (SAE NET)	697 hp @ 6,000 rpm	631 hp @ 6,000 rpm
TORQUE (SAE NET)	663 lb-ft @ 4,500 rpm	626 lb-ft @ 2,300 rpm
REDLINE	7,000 rpm	6,750 rpm
WEIGHT TO POWER	7.4 lb/hp	7.9 lb/hp
TRANSMISSION	9-speed automatic	8-speed automatic
AXLE/FINAL DRIVE RATIO	3.27:1/1.97:1	3.09:1 (front), 2.95:1 (rear)/1.97:1
SUSPENSION, FRONT; REAR	Multilink, air springs, adj shocks, adj anti-roll bar; multilink, air springs, adj shocks, adj anti-roll bar	Multilink, air springs, adj shocks, adj anti-roll bar; multilink, air springs, adj shocks, adj anti-roll bar
STEERING RATIO	14.4:1	12.2:1
TURNS LOCK TO LOCK	2.5	2.2
BRAKES, F; R	16.5-in vented, drilled, carbon-ceramic disc; 15.4-in vented, drilled, carbon-ceramic disc	17.3-in vented, drilled carbon-ceramic disc; 16.1-in vented, drilled carbon-ceramic disc
WHEELS, F; R	10.0 x 23-in; 11.5 x 23-in forged alum	10.5 x 22-in; 11.5 x 22-in forged alum
TIRES, F; R	285/35R23 107Y; 325/30R23 109Y Pirelli P Zero A8A	285/35R22 106Y; 315/30R22 107Y Pirelli P Zero Corsa N0
DIMENSIONS		
WHEELBASE	120.5 in	113.9 in
TRACK, F/R	66.9/65.5 in	66.4/66.3 in
LENGTH X WIDTH X HEIGHT	198.4 x 78.7 x 54.1–67.9 in	194.6 x 78.6 x 63.1–65.8 in
GROUND CLEARANCE	6.9–8.7 in	6.1–8.8 in
APPROACH/DEPART ANGLE	22.2–25.7/24.3–27.1 deg	18.9–23.5/17.5–21.5 deg
TURNING CIRCLE	40.7 ft	37.7 ft
CURB WEIGHT (DIST F/R)	5,124 lb (53/47%)	4,981 lb (57/43%)
SEATING CAPACITY	5	4
HEADROOM, F/R	40.6/40.0 in	38.1/38.3 in
LEGROOM, F/R	41.7/40.9 in	41.1/40.0 in
SHOULDER ROOM, F/R	58.4/54.6 in	59.1/56.4 in
CARGO VOLUME, BEH F/R	54.0/22.5 cu ft	51.7/19.4 cu ft
TOWING CAPACITY	5,940 lb	Not equipped
TEST DATA		
ACCELERATION TO MPH		
0-30	1.1 sec	1.1 sec
0-40	1.7	1.6
0-50	2.3	2.3
0-60	3.1	3.0
0-70	4.0	3.9
0-80	5.0	4.9
0-90	6.3	6.1
0-100	7.6	7.5
0-100-0	11.6	11.5
PASSING, 45-65 MPH	1.5	1.5
QUARTER MILE	11.4 sec @ 121.6 mph	11.3 sec @ 121.0 mph
BRAKING, 60-0 MPH	102 ft	105 ft
LATERAL ACCELERATION	0.98 g (avg)	1.07 g (avg)
MT FIGURE EIGHT	24.1 sec @ 0.83 g (avg)	23.2 sec @ 0.88 g (avg)
TOP-GEAR REVS @ 60 MPH	1,200 rpm	1,300 rpm
CONSUMER INFO		
BASE PRICE	$239,086	$190,150*
PRICE AS TESTED	$290,086	$197,010*
AIRBAGS	10: Dual front, f/r side, f/r curtain, front knee	10: Dual front, f/r side, f/r curtain, front knee
BASIC WARRANTY	3 years/Unlimited miles	4 years/50,000 miles
POWERTRAIN WARRANTY	3 years/Unlimited miles	4 years/50,000 miles
ROADSIDE ASSISTANCE	3 years/Unlimited miles	4 years/50,000 miles
FUEL CAPACITY	22.9 gal	23.7 gal
EPA CITY/HWY/COMB ECON	15/20/17 mpg	14/19/16 mpg
EPA RANGE, COMB	389 miles	379 miles
RECOMMENDED FUEL	Unleaded premium	Unleaded premium
ON SALE	Now	Now

*2023 pricing; 2022 model tested/photographed

CARS ARE

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LONG LIVE

PHOTO HODA EMADIPOUR

DEAD, CARS!

IN A LAND WHERE SUVS REIGN, WE STILL CELEBRATE THE BEST OF THE BEST IN TRADITIONAL AUTOMOBILES

WORDS MOTORTREND STAFF
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2023
MOTORTREND
CAR OF THE YEAR®

WORDS MIGUEL CORTINA
PHOTOGRAPHY *MT* STAFF

Heat Check

2023 Car of the Year: Behind the Scenes

This was a welcome new experience for some of our judges. After experiencing triple-digit temperatures and driving 45 high-riding vehicles during last month's SUV of the Year program, the mid-80-degree weather and 22-variant vehicle lineup (among 15 nameplates) present for this year's Car of the Year summit seemed like a walk in the park. Despite the small field, enthusiasm was abundant: As one example, associate editor and newbie judge Billy Rehbock almost had to (happily) cut short his European vacation so he could make it to COTY on time. Yes, our passion runs deep.

While young Rehbock's excitement is special even within our team of lifelong car lovers, there's no doubt inexhaustible fascination keeps the *MotorTrend* crew moving through our Of The Year season. We pride ourselves on having a uniquely talented squad that creates exclusive programs to bring everything together. After months of coordinated planning between the editorial, instrumented testing, photo, video, and social media teams, it's finally time to execute what is historically our flagship award—one that boasts the most far-reaching precedence in the automotive industry.

With nine judges on board—including guest judge Chris Theodore, perhaps known best as the father of the Ford GT—we drive all 22 vehicles around Hyundai's California Proving Ground in Mojave, our COTY home since 2006. While judges evaluate each car's interior, handling, powertrain, safety systems, technology, and design, our photo director turned producer, Brian Vance, helps set up the taco stand for lunch. After serving us for nine years, Wantaco is back with corn tortillas and a menu including carne asada, chicken, al pastor, and veggies. Alas, there's no lengua this time, but with days running long, the calories keep us moving.

As special as every OTY event is, this one felt like a warmup for our upcoming Performance Vehicle of the Year testing.

Keeping EVs charged is easy when there are only three in the field.

With 200 hp, the solidly executed Acura Integra was the model with the least power, while the 670-hp Chevrolet Corvette Z06 topped the table. There were also three electric vehicles—BMW's i4 (represented by the eDrive40 and M50 variants), Genesis' Electrified G80, and Mercedes' EQE Sedan. As judges drove all the contenders back to back to back on the high-speed oval, winding-road track, vehicle dynamics area, and special-surfaces roads, Rehbock alerted everyone of a dingo running wild around the winding road. It might have been the combination of dry air, jet lag, and long days, but we reminded our newbie that we have coyotes, not dingos, in America.

With looping done at the proving ground, we regrouped and discussed which nameplates should make it to the finalist round and which remained mere contenders. This debate usually runs long and hot, but this time we wrapped up in just more than an hour. The argument

Mojave
58
Bakersfield

Our photo team loves making editors stand around awkwardly for the camera. Here, we're all loudly debating the differences between dingos and coyotes.

No matter how hot it is, convertibles must be enjoyed with the top down.

Guest judge Chris Theodore's design walk-arounds are a COTY tradition. Above, he explains how he'd change the Corvette.

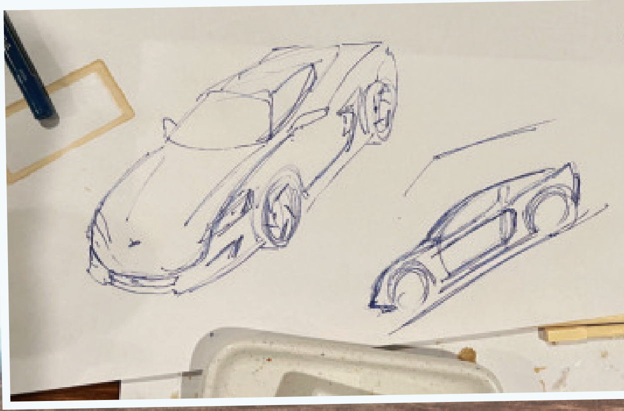
about the Toyota GR Corolla was the most ardent, with some judges insisting the Toyota wasn't as talented or as special as the new Honda Civic Type R. Judges were also split on the Integra; it's a strong contender against our key criteria, and while some saw its familial connection to the Civic as holding it back, others argued its strong chassis and value are standouts within its segment. Ultimately, the Acura moved forward.

One evening before dinner, deputy editor Alexander Stoklosa and Theodore devised a competition to see who could draw the best-looking Corvette redesign on a napkin. Some of us reminisced back a few years to the time when former Jaguar design boss and 2020 COTY judge Ian Callum ripped apart the C8's styling despite it winning our coveted award. This time around, Theodore, an engineer who still dreams of being a designer, smashed the new Z06's looks and its barrage of character lines. But at least everyone agreed he drew it better than did architect-by-training Stoklosa.

Straight Stability
Special Surface
Winding
VDA
Oval Track
On Ramp
Oval Track
Off Ramp

After driving all the finalists on public roads around Tehachapi, California, we met in a conference room to pick our winner. This debate was far more heated, with more than one reminder being made to compare every car against our six criteria and to not let emotions cloud our judgment. Features editor Christian Seabaugh then handed the nine jurors a paper ballot. He and Stoklosa tallied the votes and announced the winner. "It's closer than I thought it would be," Seabaugh said. Only one vote separated first from second place, and of our seven finalists, five made it onto at least one top-three list; we don't always have such a close competition.

Despite the small field and diverse opinions, all the judges were satisfied with the result. Our winner makes you feel special, like a *MotorTrend* Car of the Year should. In just two weeks we'll be back at it for Truck of the Year, and then PVOTY soon after. For now, it's time to go home for some rest. ■



2022 Audi A3

PROS Handy size for the day-to-day • RS 3's incredible engine • Sharp exterior design

CONS Cheap-feeling interior across the range • Limited standard safety features • Pricey at any level

As cars get ever bigger, we're always excited to drive something small as a palate cleanser. Fully redesigned for 2022, the smallest car in Audi's U.S. lineup is offered in three distinct sedan flavors—the base A3, the sporty S3, and the high-performance RS 3. During our 2023 Car of the Year event, we enjoyed pushing the trio to their limits but encountered a couple sticking points along the way that made us question whether these pint-sized sedans are worth their liter-sized price tags.

With powerful turbocharged engines across the lineup, every variant is quick; even the 201-hp A3 managed to run from 0 to 60 mph in 6.4 seconds. The more powerful S3 did the deed in just 4.6 seconds, and the I-5 RS 3 bested its siblings with a 3.6-second run. We found the drivetrains responsive and the dual-clutch automatic transmissions surprisingly refined as we accelerated to freeway speeds or ran through gears on a winding test track.

Each one of these sedans uses an independent suspension, and by and large our judges found each variant handled pavement imperfections well, though the RS 3 is undeniably the stiffest of the bunch regardless of drive mode. High-speed stability was excellent across the board, and we found the steering feel to be dialed in, as well.

The A3 plays the role of daily driver well but can still inject a little more fun into a spirited jaunt on a curvy road. The S3 is a proper sport sedan, approachable yet exhilarating to flog. But the RS 3 is a different animal altogether, almost unrecognizable as part of the A3 family. Director of editorial operations Mike Floyd called it "hilarious fun on the figure eight in RS Torque Rear," Audi's name for drift mode. With 400 hp at play, the RS 3 has a feral characteristic that makes it a unique offering in its segment.

Our biggest complaint with the Audi trio was the pervasive sense of cheap plastics in the cabin. Although the interior is well designed and we like the unusual vent placement and hard-button control scheme, our judges couldn't get past Audi's cost-cutting approach. "There's nothing aspirational about the A3's angular interior once you start to touch it," buyer's guide director Zach Gale said. "The center console's cupholder area and the space around the gear toggle are boring and cheap-looking." Standard safety tech is also lacking, and buyers will have to option expensive packages to get features that are becoming the norm on non-luxury offerings.

The hardest to justify was the RS 3. Despite the special engine and splashes of green inside our test car that reminded some of a baby Lambo, several judges found its as-tested price tag approaching $75,000 tough to swallow—especially given the cabin's deficiencies.

If you're determined to spend money on one of these small Audis, we recommend the S3, the Goldilocks of the bunch in terms of performance and value. Its quilted leather seats elevate the cockpit to a more acceptable level for the money, and forgoing a few items on the options sheet would bring it down from its almost $57,000 as-tested price.

We appreciate seeing genuinely subcompact cars still on the market, especially ones with a solid enough platform to support such a broad range of variants. But the A3 lineup lacks the materials quality and standard features to make these cars as luxury-leaning as their prices suggest they should be. **Billy Rehbock**

2022 Audi	A3 Quattro (40 TFSI)	S3	RS 3
Base Price/As Tested	$37,895/$43,440	$46,895/$56,840	$59,995/$74,595
Power (SAE Net)	201 hp @ 4,800 rpm	306 hp @ 5,450 rpm	401 hp @ 6,500 rpm
Torque (SAE Net)	221 lb-ft @ 4,100 rpm	295 lb-ft @ 3,000 rpm	369 lb-ft @ 3,500 rpm
Accel, 0-60 mph	6.4 sec	4.6 sec	3.6 sec
Quarter Mile	15.0 sec @ 91.3 mph	13.2 sec @ 105.2 mph	12.1 sec @ 113.9 mph
Braking, 60-0 mph	119 ft	108 ft	108 ft
Lateral Acceleration	0.89 g (avg)	0.92 g (avg)	0.92 g (avg)
MT Figure Eight	26.3 sec @ 0.66 g (avg)	25.5 sec @ 0.71 g (avg)	25.1 sec @ 0.76 g (avg)
EPA City/Hwy/Comb	28/36/31 mpg	23/32/27 mpg	20/29/23 mpg
EPA Range, Comb	450 miles	392 miles	334 miles

A3; S3; RS 3 VEHICLE LAYOUT Front-engine, AWD, 5-pass, 4-door sedan **ENGINE, TRANSMISSION** 2.0L turbo direct-injected DOHC 16-valve I-4; 2.5L turbo direct-injected DOHC 20-valve I-5, 7-speed twin-clutch auto **CURB WEIGHT (F/R DIST)** 3,478 lb (59/41%); 3,559 lb (58/42%); 3,597 lb (58/42%) **WHEELBASE** 103.5; 103.6 in **LENGTH x WIDTH x HEIGHT** 176.9 x 71.5 x 56.2; 177.3 x 71.5 x 55.7; 178.8 x 72.9 x 55.6 in **ON SALE** Now

2022 Mercedes-AMG SL-Class

PROS **Dragstrip launch performance • Slinky styling • Mini S-Class coupe interior fittings**

CONS **Dreadful top "switch" • Teeth-rattling Comfort mode ride • Transmission tuning**

The latest Mercedes-AMG SL-Class is a car of many "buts." We love its long-hood, short-deck proportions but aren't crazy about its rounded, saggy rear view. Launch control slingshots the car brilliantly at 3,500 rpm sans wheelspin, but when you just accelerate normally off the line, there's turbo lag. The snug new soft top looks great, isolates noise, and preserves luggage space, but raising or lowering it by pressing, sliding, and holding a digital "button" on what can be a hot, sun-baked screen is cruel and unusual. But the biggest knock was its punishing ride.

This is a well-focused track car in Race mode. It feels frenetic, very tightly bolted to the road, and it seems to lighten up (mass-wise, if not mission-wise) when pushed hard. This car is easily the sportiest SL roadster to date. During its extensive rollout, we were constantly reassured the new car's suspension would increase the car's bandwidth—preserving or improving its ride quality while sharpening the handling. Initial press events staged on carefully selected roads indeed suggested the Affalterbach team might have just pulled off that impressive feat.

But out on the test surfaces of a proving ground, meticulously engineered and maintained to replicate real-world roads, the Comfort mode ride was variously described as being "too stiff" and "abusive." And this is the AMG Active Ride Control setup with cross-linked hydraulic roll control, which raises the question: How much more comfortable can the SL 55 be?

There were other, smaller holes in the AMG SL's armor. Some found the MCT transmission juddered slightly during gentle launches, and our test team was disappointed by its Sport shift programming, which failed to downshift under hard braking or to hold a gear during steady-state cornering on our figure-eight test. With her ponytail whipping her face, Detroit editor Alisa Priddle couldn't enjoy top-down motoring on the high-speed oval. Of course, a wind blocker in the trunk promises to fix that, but guest judge and former Chrysler and Ford chief engineer Chris Theodore assessed it as "a cheap Erector set and a pain to install—I gave up." So did Priddle and features editor Christian Seabaugh. It's not a piece that helps the car go faster, so perhaps AMG "gave up" on designing the wind blocker.

Against our criteria, the SL 63 also struggled mightily in terms of value and efficiency, with pricing going up 25 to 30 percent and fuel economy down by 16 to 30 percent. In the end, director of editorial ops Mike Floyd lamented: "The SL is all fire and brimstone now. It's sort of lost its soul with the AMG makeover." Theodore summed up the SL's fish-nor-fowl predicament like this: "Overall, it's too big to be a sports car and too rough to be a grand tourer." Or a COTY finalist.

If you love your current SL, hang on to it or check out the Lexus LC 500. However, if you're an AMG GT Roadster aficionado desperate for two more seat belts flanking a padded shelf for your golf clubs, you'll love AMG's SL. **Frank Markus**

2022 Mercedes-AMG SL 63 4Matic+	
Base Price/As Tested	$180,450/$212,585
Power (SAE Net)	577 hp @ 5,500 rpm
Torque (SAE Net)	590 lb-ft @ 2,500 rpm
Accel, 0-60 mph	3.1 sec
Quarter Mile	11.3 sec @ 124.0 mph
Braking, 60-0 mph	105 ft
Lateral Acceleration	1.03 g (avg)
MT Figure Eight	23.6 sec @ 0.87 g (avg)
EPA City/Hwy/Comb	14/21/16 mpg
EPA Range, Comb	296 miles

VEHICLE LAYOUT Front-engine, AWD, 4-pass, 2-door convertible **ENGINE, TRANSMISSION** 4.0L twin-turbo direct-injected DOHC 32-valve 90-degree V-8, 9-speed automatic **CURB WEIGHT (F/R DIST)** 4,239 lb (54/46%) **WHEELBASE** 106.3 in **LENGTH x WIDTH x HEIGHT** 185.2 x 75.4 x 53.5 in **ON SALE** Now

2022 Mercedes-Benz C-Class

PROS Roomy back seat • Premium interior and exterior design • High-speed stability

CONS Brake pedal tuning • Some average-quality materials • All luxury, no sport

Upon the launch of the original CLA-Class for the 2014 model year, Mercedes-Benz created space for the C-Class, its previous base model, to move upmarket. With the debut of the newly redesigned version of the C, Mercedes aims for something that feels closer to a miniature S-Class than an entry-level offering. The results are … mixed.

Design is a strong point. The C-Class successfully scales down the drama of its larger siblings with a classic sedan profile that affords it a roomy back seat and a sizable trunk. Interior design feels more upscale than the outgoing model, too; the marque's new 11.6-inch vertical infotainment display does the heavy lifting here, but judges also praised the car's wood and aluminum trim.

The cabin looks more expensive than it feels, however. If you poke and prod, some of the plastics will creak and the metal trim will flex; features editor Christian Seabaugh noted, "Nothing is as nice to touch as it is to look at." We also took issue with the plentiful use of piano black trim, a material infamous for attracting fingerprints and scratches. On the plus side, judges applauded the plush, thick-rimmed steering wheel and the level of customization in the infotainment and instrument cluster displays.

The driving experience is similar: at times impressive but also flawed. Some judges praised the ride quality, and others noted a "general floppiness" and pointed out the suspension does not like undulating pavement. We also detected an undue vibration through the floorpan on the AWD model; we attributed that to the front driveshaft. Associate editor Billy Rehbock, for one, felt the previous C-Class had a pleasant driving experience that's missing from the new model, at least the base C300 and C300 4Matic examples we evaluated.

Some judges also thought the new C lacked some of the athleticism present in prior examples, an ability even Sport+ mode wasn't able to unlock. But the C-Class isn't a slouch in a straight line, with the base car running to 60 mph in a respectable 6.2 seconds and the 4Matic model hitting the mark in 5.5 seconds. Numerous judges had good things to say about the new car's high-speed stability—a must-have attribute for any autobahn-worthy German luxury sedan.

Slowing down the C-Class was another matter entirely, as the brake pedal drew near universal disdain. One judge compared its squishy engagement and lack of feel to his far-from-mint 1995 E-Class, and another only half-jokingly thought maybe the brakes were broken.

Taken as a whole, the new C-Class isn't a bad car. Far from it. Mercedes nailed the design inside and out, we're generally fans of the new mild hybrid base engine, the back seat is spacious for the segment, and highway cruising delivers stability we've come to expect. Its flaws, though, mean the redesigned C-Class just isn't quite Car of the Year material. **Duncan Brady**

2022 Mercedes-Benz C300		C300 4Matic
Base Price/As Tested	$44,600/$58,120	$46,600/$62,620
Power (SAE Net)	255 hp @ 5,800 rpm (gas), 20 hp (elec); 255 hp (comb)	255 hp @ 5,800 rpm (gas), 20 hp (elec); 255 hp (comb)
Torque (SAE Net)	295 lb-ft @ 2,000 rpm (gas), 148 lb-ft (elec); 295 lb-ft (comb)	295 lb-ft @ 2,000 rpm (gas), 148 lb-ft (elec); 295 lb-ft (comb)
Accel, 0-60 mph	6.2 sec	5.5 sec
Quarter Mile	14.6 sec @ 96.4 mph	14.2 sec @ 96.8 mph
Braking, 60-0 mph	114 ft	112 ft
Lateral Acceleration	0.88 g (avg)	0.90 g (avg)
MT Figure Eight	26.6 sec @ 0.67 g (avg)	26.3 sec @ 0.67 g (avg)
EPA City/Hwy/Comb	23/35/29 mpg	23/33/27 mpg
EPA Range, Comb	505 miles	470 miles

C300; C300 4MATIC VEHICLE LAYOUT Front-engine, RWD; AWD, 5-pass, 4-door sedan **ENGINE, TRANSMISSION** 2.0L turbo direct-injected DOHC 16-valve I-4 plus permanent-magnet electric, 9-speed automatic **CURB WEIGHT (F/R DIST)** 3,899 lb (52/48%); 4,019 lb (53/47%) **WHEELBASE** 112.8 in **LENGTH x WIDTH x HEIGHT** 187.0 x 71.7 x 56.6 in **ON SALE** Now

2023 Mercedes-EQ EQE

PROS Cool aero-focused wheel design • Wow-factor interior • Car plans trips for you

CONS Ungainly proportions • Moving brake pedal not for everyone • Small trunk for its class

This was a tough one. The EQE sedan is essentially the EV equivalent of the vaunted E-Class, a car known for its elegant design, responsive driving dynamics, and technological advancements (and our 2021 Car of the Year). But Mercedes also uses its EQ subbrand to set vehicles like the EQE apart from its more traditional models—all while making a statement about the future.

This car does that, though the final result is controversial.

It starts with the EQE's ungainly proportions. Because it uses a shrunken version of the Mercedes EQS' platform, it exacerbates that car's molten shape, making it even more awkward. It does have some design flair, however, thanks to its perforated wheel design and shiny black grille adorned with tiny three-pointed stars.

Touching the overly complicated door handles triggers soothing music as you enter the stunning interior. Our test car's cabin was a warm two-tone café au lait and ivory with dark matte wood and copper highlights. Keeping the white steering wheel clean might be a challenge, but the overall package is impressive.

"Spaceship alert! The EQE's white interior is just bizarro-world cool the first time you step inside," director of editorial operations Mike Floyd said, adding that he loved the turbo-fan HVAC outlets. The EQE even has three noise profiles, which some found silly.

Its diamond-stitched perforated leather seats are heated, cooled, and comfortable. Instead of a massage, the car offers "kinetics" for those riding up front, where the seat moves to stimulate muscles to keep you comfortable and alert. It also "wins the back seat test," technical director Frank Markus said. He called out the second row's excellent thigh support, pull-down armrest with pop-out cupholders, dual-zone climate control, and a pullout tray with two USB outlets.

The EQE shines with technology. Our test car didn't come with the higher-end Hyperscreen, but many judges prefer the less overwhelming base display. Graphics in the driver cluster include a blue oval ring that radiates outward as you accelerate and shrinks as you slow down.

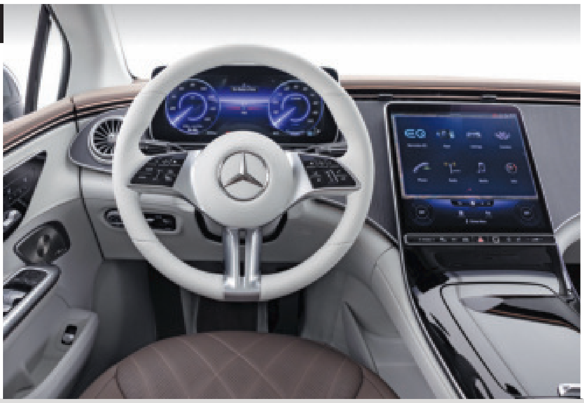
Speaking of acceleration, the EQE lights off with a rush, as most EVs do, and then relaxes at higher speeds. Judges thought the car's suspension was supple in most instances, yet it exhibited an uncharacteristic harshness over some obstacles. We also experienced more body roll than anticipated for a high-end sedan.

The brakes' reaction to inputs drew mixed reviews. Some judges never warmed to how the pedal moves relative to the amount of regenerative braking. "Brake feel is not progressive, and pedal travel is far too long," guest judge Chris Theodore said. Others thought the overall braking setup wasn't out of line for an EV.

Like other EQ-branded models, the EQE is a rolling representation of where Mercedes is headed in the EV space. But ultimately, it faltered against the weight of high expectations. "It's supposed to be an E-Class EV but doesn't quite feel like one," Theodore said, putting a cap on our judges' sentiments.

Alisa Priddle

2023 Mercedes-EQ EQE350 4Matic	
Base Price/As Tested	$79,050/$93,640
Power (SAE Net)	288 hp
Torque (SAE Net)	564 lb-ft
Accel, 0-60 mph	5.2 sec
Quarter Mile	13.9 sec @ 97.4 mph
Braking, 60-0 mph	117 ft
Lateral Acceleration	0.86 g (avg)
MT Figure Eight	26.3 sec @ 0.69 g (avg)
EPA City/Hwy/Comb	131/110/121 mpg-e (est)
EPA Range, Comb	330 miles (est)



VEHICLE LAYOUT Front- and rear-motor, AWD, 5-pass, 4-door sedan **MOTORS, TRANSMISSIONS** Permanent-magnet electric, 1-speed automatic **CURB WEIGHT (F/R DIST)** 5,484 lb (50/50%) **WHEELBASE** 122.8 in **LENGTH x WIDTH x HEIGHT** 196.6 x 72.6 x 59.5 in **ON SALE** Now

Contenders

2023 Nissan Z

PROS Comfortable ride • Approachable handling limits • More power than before

CONS Extra power offset by extra mass • Cabin feels old despite being new • Limited-slip differential only on upper trims

What's old is new again? The 2023 Nissan Z takes that phrase literally, as it represents yet another rehash of a rear-wheel-drive platform dating back to the 2003 350Z. Nissan reanimated those old bones for the 370Z in 2010, and here they are again for the new, numberless Z.

Next to its mashup of retro Z styling cues—the nose is pure, original 240Z, while the tail is more 300ZX—the car also trades the 370Z's 3.7-liter V-6 for a 400-hp 3.0-liter twin-turbo V-6. The interior inherits a host of carryover gauges, switchgear, and other elements presented in a new arrangement with some fresh displays. Judges grappled with how the Z's obvious steps forward clashed with the coupe's vague sense of oldness. As associate editor Billy Rehbock put it, "The new Z is a cyberpunk king, an odd blend of futuristic looks and tech—big displays that no Z has ever had before—and an old-school platform."

Nissan upgraded the Z's platform, but the extra bracing, newer interior bits, and new V-6 raise the curb weight accordingly, dulling the impact of the 400 hp on tap. The Z's 4.9-second 0–60 time outruns the 332-hp 370Z, but it merely matches that of the 350-hp 370Z NISMO model. At least the new engine is smoother, though numerous judges agreed with Detroit editor Alisa Priddle, who "wanted a good engine note from a car like this and was disappointed."

Ride quality was a surprising bright spot. That comes at the expense of some sharpness, as guest judge Chris Theodore observed: "The steering is not terribly communicative, and the brakes are just OK. The engine revs nicely, but the shifter is a tad sloppy, and the car bounces around a bit when pushed." If that sounds like middling praise, he added that it's nonetheless "an improvement over the last-generation Z." Ouch.

The problem with the Z is that it lives under a devil's bargain. Nissan could have designed a totally new car. Pragmatism—the notion that two-door sporty cars don't sell well and are therefore tough to justify—led to recycling of yesterday's Z cars for this new one.

Reactions to this choice were mixed. Priddle said she's "OK with a modified version of the old 370Z's architecture because otherwise the financial case might have precluded this from happening at all." Others thought Nissan should have taken the market's hint and spent its money elsewhere. Likening the Z's "redesign" to a cheap home flip, features editor Christian Seabaugh didn't pull punches, declaring, "I don't want to knock Nissan for making something for enthusiasts, but it feels like the bare minimum was done here."

In the end, it was that nagging sense that the Z is already dated that held it back. Scoring poorly in engineering excellence and design advancement, the Z made up ground with value and performance of intended function. But whenever one of our judges found a way to get excited about it, the Z would find a way to remind them to calm down, whether through its driveline clunking at low speeds or the interior trim and carryover switchgear failing to impress.

The familiar looks and experience are somewhat charming, but a car that feels this old simply can't move the needle enough to score our Calipers.

Alexander Stoklosa

2023 Nissan Z	
Base Price/As Tested	$41,015/$53,610
Power (SAE Net)	400 hp @ 6,400 rpm
Torque (SAE Net)	350 lb-ft @ 1,600 rpm
Accel, 0-60 mph	4.9 sec
Quarter Mile	13.5 sec @ 105.3 mph
Braking, 60-0 mph	110 ft
Lateral Acceleration	0.93 g (avg)
MT Figure Eight	25.3 sec @ 0.74 g (avg)
EPA City/Hwy/Comb	18/24/20 mpg
EPA Range, Comb	328 miles (est)

VEHICLE LAYOUT Front-engine, RWD, 2-pass, 2-door hatchback **ENGINE, TRANSMISSION** 3.0L twin-turbo direct-injected DOHC 24-valve 60-degree V-6, 6-speed manual **CURB WEIGHT (F/R DIST)** 3,519 lb (57/43%) **WHEELBASE** 100.4 in **LENGTH x WIDTH x HEIGHT** 172.4 x 72.6 x 51.8 in **ON SALE** Now

2022 Subaru WRX

PROS **Feels a lot like the original • More practical than the previous sedan • Manual version is quite fun**

CONS **Powerband is too narrow • Among the slowest WRX models ever • The automatic option isn't fun**

The Subaru WRX has long been the enthusiast's default choice for an all-weather sport compact. With rally-bred heritage, standard all-wheel drive, and potent turbocharged engines, the WRX has mastered its domain—especially since Mitsubishi vacated the space when it canned the Lancer. By that measure, the new WRX is primed for success.

Longer, lower, wider, and stiffer than the version it replaces, the new WRX aims to somehow be more things to more people. Its new chassis makes for a roomier, more practical car, while the revised-for-2022 CVT (optimistically branded as "Subaru Performance Transmission") helps broaden appeal even to commuters. Enthusiasts haven't been forgotten, though. The WRX sports a new 2.4-liter turbocharged flat-four good for 271 hp and 258 lb-ft of torque, an upgraded six-speed manual, and, on top-trim CVT-backed models, a new electronically adjustable suspension.

In theory, that makes the new 2022 WRX quite a strong contender. In practice, things are more complicated. The new engine, despite being bigger than the 2.0-liter turbocharged flat-four it replaces, only makes 3 more horsepower and is less efficient with the manual than before. Worse, it makes the new WRX among the slowest we've ever tested, including the plucky 2002 original.

But as any driving enthusiast knows, numbers aren't everything. For some, the new WRX was "the best I've ever driven," as guest judge Chris Theodore said. Although slower than the original, the latest WRX captures much of the model's traditional character. It thrives most when driven aggressively; its engine is laggy and peaky, and it has a narrow powerband, but at this point, that's a WRX feature, not a bug. It's also rewarding to row through the mostly positive-feeling shifter, even if it's slightly clunky at times. The effortlessly light steering, subtle body roll, and soft brake pedal feel also hark back to the original, though not all judges appreciated those traits.

While we split on the WRX's dynamic virtues, judges were near unanimous in their disdain for the CVT-equipped version. As a commuter car, the automatic WRX is fine—comfortable, sporty enough, and, in the GT trim we tested, packed with convenience features. But try to drive it hard, and the CVT is incapable of making the most of the new flat-four's narrow powerband. Sure, the CVT decently executes its fake shifts, but it can't keep the engine in the sliver of the tach where it makes peak power. "The CVT version feels like a slightly edgier Legacy sedan," deputy editor Alexander Stoklosa said. Even worse—and speaking toward our performance of intended function criterion—numerous editors said the CVT-backed WRX wasn't fun to drive. It's a fine car—but not a good WRX.

The rest of the experience also variously hits and misses on our criteria. Judges generally liked the new sheetmetal, but most found the new tablet-sized infotainment display's graphics and UX unrefined. The WRX scored safety points for offering the latest version of Subaru's EyeSight driver assistance, though the system is unavailable on the popular manual version. Ultimately, the manual WRX lives up to its reputation for satisfying all-weather performance, but as a lineup—and crucially against our criteria—the new model doesn't rise above the fray. **Christian Seabaugh**

2022 Subaru WRX (Limited)		WRX (GT)
Base Price/As Tested	$37,490/$37,490	$43,390/$43,390
Power (SAE Net)	271 hp @ 5,600 rpm	271 hp @ 5,600 rpm
Torque (SAE Net)	258 lb-ft @ 2,000 rpm	258 lb-ft @ 2,000 rpm
Accel, 0-60 mph	5.9 sec	6.0 sec
Quarter Mile	14.2 sec @ 98.2 mph	14.6 sec @ 98.9 mph
Braking, 60-0 mph	112 ft	116 ft
Lateral Acceleration	0.96 g (avg)	0.91 g (avg)
MT Figure Eight	24.8 sec @ 0.75 g (avg)	25.4 sec @ 0.71 g (avg)
EPA City/Hwy/Comb	19/26/22 mpg	19/25/21 mpg
EPA Range, Comb	365 miles	349 miles

LIMITED; GT VEHICLE LAYOUT Front-engine, AWD, 5-pass, 4-door sedan **ENGINE, TRANSMISSION** 2.4L turbo direct-injected DOHC 16-valve flat-4, 6-speed manual; cont variable auto **CURB WEIGHT (F/R DIST)** 3,400 lb (60/40%); 3,538 lb (61/39%) **WHEELBASE** 105.2 in **LENGTH x WIDTH x HEIGHT** 183.8 x 71.9 x 57.8 in **ON SALE** Now

2023 Toyota GR Corolla

PROS **Superb value • Torque-splitting AWD • Great exhaust sound**

CONS **Plain Jane interior • Polarizing exterior details • Harsh suspension**

On paper, the 2023 Toyota GR Corolla is one of those cars every enthusiast wants. In person, the GR Corolla is a car your next-door neighbor wishes they had.

From its 300 hp to its torque-splitting all-wheel-drive system and its great exhaust sound, Toyota finally created something to compete against cars like the Honda Civic Type R and Volkswagen Golf R. "A respectable little hot hatch," technical director Frank Markus said after running it around Hyundai's California Proving Ground.

With its 1.6-liter turbocharged three-cylinder engine, the GR Corolla is peppy, punchy, and potent, and it's an engaging car to drive. "This Corolla feels chuckable, light, and eager to do silly things," deputy editor Alexander Stoklosa said, "though I wish it were a better dance partner when it comes to oversteer." Features editor Christian Seabaugh disagreed, calling the GR "controllably tail-happy" after a hard drive. Either way, although the GR Corolla shares its TNGA platform with lesser versions, it gets an exclusive all-wheel-drive setup that can send up to 70 percent of torque to the rear wheels in pursuit of delivering more thrills.

As pleased as we are with Toyota's new hatchback, though, it's not perfect. Despite the six-speed manual transmission's short throws, some judges complained about its gear spacing and overall smoothness. Furthermore, some also disliked the car's ride quality, citing dampers that fail to sufficiently cushion things when going over the proving ground's simulated road imperfections and broken pavement.

Although its value is generally strong for a $37,000 car, we were disappointed with our test car's plain interior. The lack of an armrest, the presence of hard plastics in the front and rear, and the all-black theme kept the GR Corolla from winning our hearts. "It's a sad car to look at and sit in," said guest judge Chris Theodore, who described the exterior design as "a look only a mother could love." Furthermore, the price rises quickly while content doesn't, undercutting value beyond the base price.

The GR Corolla earned high marks for its performance of intended function, safety, and engineering excellence, but it falls short when considered against the rest of our criteria. The GR isn't especially easy to distinguish from other Corollas at a distance, its interior lacks the practicality and comfort of others in the lineup, and it's by far the least efficient Corolla you can buy today.

Overall, Toyota has built a fun hot hatch, great for those who love the thrill of performance but don't have a lot of money to spend. "It's wild and a little flawed, but the GR Corolla is immediately worth considering for anyone who loves driving," director of editorial operations Mike Floyd said.

He's right, but within the context of our Car of the Year evaluations, it's a bit too narrowly focused and compromised to hit the marks necessary for victory.

Miguel Cortina

2023 Toyota GR Corolla (Core)	
Base Price/As Tested	$36,995/$39,870
Power (SAE Net)	300 hp @ 6,500 rpm
Torque (SAE Net)	273 lb-ft @ 3,000 rpm
Accel, 0-60 mph	5.4 sec
Quarter Mile	13.7 sec @ 101.2 mph
Braking, 60-0 mph	110 ft
Lateral Acceleration	0.94 g (avg)
MT Figure Eight	25.0 sec @ 0.75 g (avg)
EPA City/Hwy/Comb	21/28/24 mpg (est)
EPA Range, Comb	317 miles (est)

VEHICLE LAYOUT Front-engine, AWD, 5-pass, 4-door hatchback **ENGINE, TRANSMISSION** 1.6L turbo port- and direct-injected DOHC 12-valve I-3, 6-speed manual **CURB WEIGHT (F/R DIST)** 3,145 lb (60/40%) **WHEELBASE** 103.9 in **LENGTH x WIDTH x HEIGHT** 173.6 x 72.8 x 57.2 in **ON SALE** Now

2022 Volkswagen Arteon

PROS **Beautiful design • Quicker than before • Spacious back seat**

CONS **Underwhelming interior • Infotainment needs improvement • Pricey**

The 2022 Volkswagen Arteon's biggest challenge isn't another car; rather, it's Father Time. As Nissan, Dodge, and Chrysler exit the full-size car scene, there is no question this small segment is shrinking. So VW's latest updates to the Arteon intrigue us, and with this improved version, we wonder whether the company can make buyers care about the Arteon before they stop buying mainstream-branded full-size cars altogether.

We hope so, because the Arteon is just as pretty today as when it arrived in the U.S. for the 2019 model year. "This is one of the most beautiful mainstream four-doors on the market," Mexico editor Miguel Cortina said.

We wish we could say the same about the interior, but the Arteon's insides don't impress. There's an acceptable mix of hard and soft materials for a non-premium nameplate, but we were disappointed by the number of button blanks on the center console considering our test car's MSRP of more than $50,000. The discontinued Toyota Avalon featured a better overall interior for thousands less.

The Arteon's infotainment system presents another round of ups and downs. Although we appreciate the standard digital instrument cluster, the 8.0-inch touchscreen is too small and positioned far too low on the center stack. A few judges had issues with the system, with one calling it clunky and another accidentally pressing the flat buttons to the left of the screen while trying to turn the small volume knob.

Underneath a design that's survived with minor changes, the Arteon received a full powertrain transplant for 2022. A 2.0-liter turbo I-4 good for 300 hp and a seven-speed dual-clutch automatic replace 2021's 268-hp engine and eight-speed automatic. (Thank you, Golf R.) In the 2022 Arteon, this setup helps the comfortably sized sedan hustle to 60 mph in only 5.0 seconds. That's great, but there's more to performance than straight-line acceleration.

"Overall, I bet most people who buy this flagship VW will find it sporty and satisfying," road test editor Chris Walton said while also noting the steering felt a bit distant. We couldn't agree on its dynamics, however. Some felt as Walton did, yet others found the performance underwhelming.

"Basically nothing about this Arteon communicates a willingness to tackle a twisty road aggressively," technical director Frank Markus said. "It's not sloppy, necessarily. It just doesn't whistle while it works."

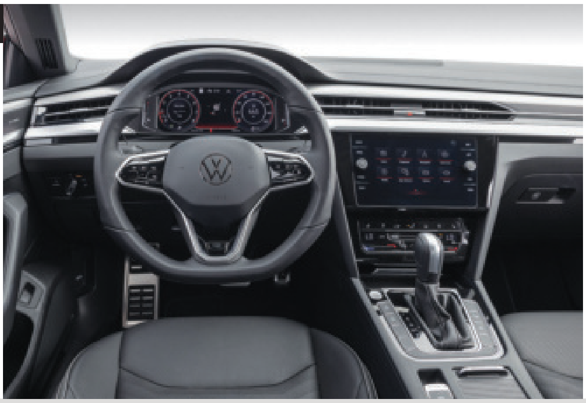
The Arteon now starts at more than $40,000, and our bright red test car carried a $51,240 MSRP, a price justified partially by its spacious interior, all-wheel drive, quick acceleration, massaging driver's seat, panoramic sunroof, 360-degree camera system, and four-year/50,000-mile warranty. Volkswagen's problem is, at $50,000, many other well-equipped luxury alternatives exist to entice buyers who don't need a large back seat.

Certainly the allure of a luxury car is difficult for some to pass up, and the Arteon's overall package—as improved as it is—isn't good enough to become a Car of the Year finalist.

Still, even if Volkswagen retires the Arteon before it reaches its full potential, sedan fans have reason to hope for the future: The upcoming all-electric ID Aero sedan could be the fully realized four-door the Arteon still strives to be.

Zach Gale

2022 Volkswagen Arteon 4Motion R-Line (SEL)	
Base Price/As Tested	$46,845/$51,240
Power (SAE Net)	300 hp @ 5,350 rpm
Torque (SAE Net)	295 lb-ft @ 2,000 rpm
Accel, 0-60 mph	5.0 sec
Quarter Mile	13.6 sec @ 100.4 mph
Braking, 60-0 mph	125 ft
Lateral Acceleration	0.84 g (avg)
MT Figure Eight	26.9 sec @ 0.63 g (avg)
EPA City/Hwy/Comb	22/30/25 mpg
EPA Range, Comb	435 miles



VEHICLE LAYOUT Front-engine, AWD, 5-pass, 4-door sedan **ENGINE, TRANSMISSION** 2.0L turbo direct-injected DOHC 16-valve I-4, 7-speed twin-clutch auto **CURB WEIGHT (F/R DIST)** 3,911 lb (57/43%) **WHEELBASE** 111.9 in **LENGTH x WIDTH x HEIGHT** 191.5 x 73.7 x 56.8 in **ON SALE** Now

Finalists

2023 Acura Integra

PROS **Sharp handling • Practical hatchback body • Stellar fuel economy**

CONS **Too much Civic inside not to notice • No summer tire option • Road noise is an issue**

The resurrected Acura Integra is an exceptional car when viewed within a vacuum. It competes against other small luxury cars such as the Audi A3, BMW 2 Series Gran Coupe, and Mercedes-Benz CLA-Class but costs far less and is much larger inside than all of them. The styling laid over the Integra's hatchback shape might not be beautiful, but it is eye-catching with plenty of sharp detailing. Plus, the cabin is slathered with mostly upmarket materials and has, on top-level trims, a 16-speaker ELS audio system that's so good it brings tears of joy.

You can't spend more than $38,000 on a new Integra without losing yourself in the accessories catalog; each trim level, from the $31,000 base car to the midlevel A-Spec to the A-Spec with the Technology package, comes essentially one way. Just pick your colors inside and out. Need we remind you the average transaction price of a new car has nearly clipped 50 grand? The Acura is far less than that yet has a premium badge, tidy handling, and a fuel-sipping 200-hp turbocharged I-4 engine. You can even buy it with an excellent six-speed manual with typical Honda—wait, stop. We couldn't help ourselves. We said the "H" word.

Ah, yes. Speak the words "Honda" or "Civic," and the Integra's vacuum pops like someone blew the airlock. That's because, much like the original Integra from 1986, this new one is essentially a heavily revised Honda Civic, though it combines Civic parts in ways you can't replicate with a Honda badge. This is the only way to smash the Civic Si's engine together with an automatic transmission or a hatchback body, for example.

The latest Civic is, of course, excellent, and it also was a finalist in last year's Car of the Year evaluations. Everything that makes the Civic so great is present here, too: a roomy, well-assembled interior; a wonderfully tuned suspension; and the same 200-hp powertrain from the sporty Civic Si sedan. The question is: Why not just buy a Civic? Could the Integra really carry the class-above Civic's value proposition into the literal class above?

It does and it doesn't. We found the Acura's interior nicer and roomier than the A3's, and the adaptive dampers on our loaded test cars deliver a smoother ride than found in the Civic. But performance is merely so-so. Some judges found the styling questionable—try to unsee the Integra's front overhang—while others wondered whether the base and midlevel trims we didn't have on hand could make as strong an impression. Buyer's guide director Zach Gale was quick to remind the group those versions get a smaller 7.0-inch touchscreen instead of the A-Spec Tech package's 9.0-inch display.

Judges butted heads over the Acura's relative value, which is strong in class but less so when, again, you bring up the Honda. Either way, in spite of the Acura's essential goodness, it simply has too many flaws for an aspirational vehicle. It drives smartly and is packed with features, yet it is "Honda-loud" on the freeway, as technical director Frank Markus noted, its tires playing different road surfaces like a violin. The rear-seat area has noticeably lower-grade trim than the front and lacks basics such as air vents.

These problems are all shared with the Civic, and we expected Acura would fix them in exchange for the higher prices it charges. Unfortunately, it did not.

Alexander Stoklosa

2023 Acura Integra A-Spec		A-Spec (manual)
Base Price/As Tested	$33,895/$34,395	$36,895/$37,395
Power (SAE Net)	200 hp @ 6,000 rpm	200 hp @ 6,000 rpm
Torque (SAE Net)	192 lb-ft @ 1,800 rpm	192 lb-ft @ 1,800 rpm
Accel, 0-60 mph	7.6 sec	7.6 sec
Quarter Mile	15.9 sec @ 92.9 mph	15.6 sec @ 91.4 mph
Braking, 60-0 mph	121 ft	123 ft
Lateral Acceleration	0.92 g (avg)	0.87 g (avg)
MT Figure Eight	26.6 sec @ 0.67 g (avg)	27.2 sec @ 0.63 g (avg)
EPA City/Hwy/Comb	29/36/32 mpg	26/36/30 mpg
EPA Range, Comb	397 miles	372 miles

AUTO; MANUAL VEHICLE LAYOUT Front-engine, FWD, 5-pass, 4-door hatchback **ENGINE, TRANSMISSION** 1.5L turbo direct-injected DOHC 16-valve I-4, cont variable auto; 6-speed manual **CURB WEIGHT (F/R DIST)** 3,117 lb (61/39%); 3,040 lb (60/40%) **WHEELBASE** 107.7 in **LENGTH x WIDTH x HEIGHT** 185.8 x 72.0 x 55.5 in **ON SALE** Now

2022 BMW 2 Series Coupe

PROS Return of the light, fun BMW coupe • Excellent I-4 and I-6 powertrains • Longer wheelbase improves second row

CONS Lacks some standard safety systems • Center console lacks storage space • Occasionally glitchy infotainment system

A slow clap for BMW bringing a new 2 Series to the lineup. There isn't much appetite in this world for compact, playful sport coupes, yet here the 2 sits. It does more than that, though—while the second-generation car has grown, it remains the smallest and lightest BMW coupe, which, along with its wonderful suspension setup and slick powertrains, reminded our judges of the heyday of BMW's 3 Series.

The 3 Series connection is more than spiritual. The 230i and more powerful M240i ride on the same rear-drive platform as the 3 and 4 Series and should not be confused with the front-drive 2 Series Gran Coupe sedans, which have more in common with Minis than other BMWs.

One look at the two 2 Series, and this should be obvious.

The coupe's long hood, short trunklid, and perky roofline lend it an "overall appearance that is not directly retro but builds upon BMW's legendary heritage," guest judge Chris Theodore said. "I think the design will wear well and be cherished by future enthusiasts as a classic."

Both coupes deliver driving purity and performance with light and accurate steering, excellent suspension tuning, and a composed chassis delivering a connection to the road without transmitting all its imperfections.

Neither hurts for power. "These 255 horses are thoroughbreds all," technical director Frank Markus said of the 230i's turbocharged I-4. He's right, as it recorded a swift 5.3-second rip to 60 mph.

The M240i xDrive upgrades to BMW's 382-hp, 369-lb-ft 3.0-liter turbocharged I-6 and is offered initially with all-wheel drive, though a rear-drive variant is coming. "The powertrain is peerless," deputy editor Alexander Stoklosa said. The extra power and all-wheel traction drops the 0–60 time to 4.0 seconds. Both use an eight-speed automatic, which testing director Eric Tingwall found as satisfying as the best dual-clutch transmissions.

The simplified iDrive system is easier to use than before, but some judges still experienced glitches and overly complicated menus. Don't get too attached to the screen layout, though; for 2023, a new interior will swap the gauge cluster and central display for BMW's iDrive 8 curved displays.

The 230i's $37,345 base price is nice, but our $46,570 test car still didn't have adaptive cruise control (it costs $550) or lane keep assist (completely unavailable). Even the $59,920 M240i lacked lane centering or lane keep assist. Take the old-school view that a driver's car should be driven, not assisted, and maybe the lack of standard safety tech could be overlooked. The otherwise well-equipped 2 Series is "a rolling reminder of what BMW used to stand for" and a testament that driving purity can still exist underneath modern tech and luxury, buyer's guide director Zach Gale said.

The 230i even came with a fixed suspension setup—no adaptive dampers here!—and rode and handled the way BMWs of yore did, when they were benchmark sport sedans. The new 2 Series is proof BMW still knows how to build a driver's car, and it's great enough to easily make our 2023 Car of the Year finalist roster.

Alisa Priddle

2022 BMW 230i Coupe		M240i xDrive Coupe
Base Price/As Tested	$37,345/$46,570	$49,545/$59,920
Power (SAE Net)	255 hp @ 5,000 rpm	382 hp @ 5,800 rpm
Torque (SAE Net)	295 lb-ft @ 1,550 rpm	369 lb-ft @ 1,800 rpm
Accel, 0-60 mph	5.3 sec	4.0 sec
Quarter Mile	13.9 sec @ 100.7 mph	12.4 sec @ 112.1 mph
Braking, 60-0 mph	112 ft	103 ft
Lateral Acceleration	0.92 g (avg)	0.98 g (avg)
MT Figure Eight	25.5 sec @ 0.71 g (avg)	24.4 sec @ 0.80 g (avg)
EPA City/Hwy/Comb	26/35/29 mpg	23/32/26 mpg
EPA Range, Comb	397 miles	356 miles

230i, M240i VEHICLE LAYOUT Front-engine, RWD, 4-pass, 2-door coupe; front-engine, AWD, 4-pass, 2-door coupe **ENGINE, TRANSMISSION** 2.0L turbo direct-injected DOHC 16-valve I-4; 3.0L turbo direct-injected DOHC 24-valve I-6, 8-speed automatic **CURB WEIGHT (F/R DIST)** 3,535 lb (50/50%); 3,876 lb (53/47%) **WHEELBASE** 107.9 in **LENGTH x WIDTH x HEIGHT** 179.0 x 72.4 x 54.8; 179.4 x 72.4 x 55.3 in **ON SALE** Now

Finalists

2022 BMW i4

PROS Slick EV integration • Crushingly normal, unlike most EVs • Channels core BMW traits

CONS Eco-minded tires can be loud • Awkward ingress/egress • Limited center-console storage space

Look at the BMW i4, then look at a current BMW 4 Series Gran Coupe. The two four-door hatchbacks are virtually identical, their shared platform flexible enough to support both electric and gas-powered models. Cover the i4's badges, and it's tough to identify as an EV—save for the lack of exhaust pipes and its blocked-off kidney grilles.

Typically, gas cars converted to EVs don't feel as properly baked as dedicated EVs from the Teslas and Rivians of the world. But that's not the case with the i4. It doesn't come with compromises like an obviously taller floor, extreme curb weight, or packaging issues from shoehorning motors and batteries into areas where none previously existed.

There are two flavors of the i4 for now: the single-motor, rear-drive eDrive40 and the dual-motor, all-wheel-drive M50. (Soon, the lower-output eDrive35 will join the lineup, as well.) Surprisingly, our judges gravitated to the eDrive40, both for its value—it starts in the mid-$50Ks—and efficiency. As associate editor Billy Rehbock observed, using the M50's "fantastic acceleration drains the battery pretty quickly."

That's because the two i4s share an 84-kWh battery pack. The 536-hp M50's 3.3-second 0–60 time comes at the expense of range, which can be as low as 227 or as high as 270 miles depending on wheel size. The eDrive40: 282 to 301 miles.

With the same rear motor as the M50, tuned for 335 hp, the 300-pound-lighter eDrive40 hits 60 mph in 4.7 seconds. Mash the go pedal, and the rear tires light up; do so while turning, and prepare to catch the oversteer. Add in the buttoned-down chassis and well-damped ride, and the i4 faithfully translates BMWisms to an electric format—a feat that propelled it to our 2023 Car of the Year finalist round.

Flaws are few. There is no frunk, and the eco tires can be loud. As in the 4 Series, the back seat is smallish, and the seats are set back relative to the narrow door openings, making entry and exit an exercise in human origami.

It also isn't readily apparent the BMW enjoys a true one-pedal drive mode. Only the i4's most aggressive regen settings can bring it to a full stop. Adjusting those levels requires a frustratingly deep trip into its new iDrive 8 touchscreen menus. Flipping the shifter to the "B" position is the easier way to use its primary regen feature, though several judges complained it slowed too, um, slowly, regardless of setting.

But judges kept coming back to the i4's competitive pricing, especially relative to the Tesla Model 3, and how it represents the first true size- and price-appropriate alternative to the Tesla, with fit and finish and cabin materials that would make Elon blush. The i4's sounds also garnered attention. Features editor Christian Seabaugh was agog over the noises that "bring a sense of occasion to the car" as they rise in sync with your acceleration. After a spin on the handling course, Detroit editor Alisa Priddle proclaimed the "sounds were freaking me right out," though she couldn't tell if she loved or hated them.

Most judges liked how the i4 didn't freak anyone out looks-wise. Unlike BMW's future-tastic iX SUV, the i4 seems like a normal BMW that happens to be electric. Ultimately, though, it's that last part that hung us up with two key COTY criteria: Is hiding the future in today's wrapper a failure to advance design, or is it excellent engineering? **Alexander Stoklosa**

2022 BMW i4 eDrive40 Gran Coupe		M50 Gran Coupe
Base Price/As Tested	$56,395/$64,820	$66,895/$76,670
Power (SAE Net)	335 hp	225 hp (front), 308 hp (rear); 536 hp (comb)
Torque (SAE Net)	317 lb-ft	267 lb-ft (front est), 323 lb-ft (rear est); 586 lb-ft (comb)
Accel, 0–60 mph	4.7 sec	3.3 sec
Quarter Mile	13.2 sec @ 108.1 mph	11.6 sec @ 120.9 mph
Braking, 60–0 mph	117 ft	104 ft
Lateral Acceleration	0.89 g (avg)	0.94 g (avg)
MT Figure Eight	25.8 sec @ 0.73 g (avg)	24.5 sec @ 0.80 g (avg)
EPA City/Hwy/Comb	100/98/99 mpg-e	79/80/80 mpg-e
EPA Range, Comb	282 miles	227 miles

eDRIVE40; M50 VEHICLE LAYOUT Rear-motor, RWD, 5-pass, 4-door hatchback; front- and rear-motor, AWD, 5-pass, 4-door hatchback **MOTORS, TRANSMISSIONS** Brushed synchronous electric, 1-speed automatic **CURB WEIGHT (F/R DIST)** 4,708 lb (45/55%); 5,012 lb (48/52%) **WHEELBASE** 112.4 in **LENGTH x WIDTH x HEIGHT** 188.5 x 72.9 x 57.0 **ON SALE** Now

2023 Chevrolet Corvette Z06

PROS Euro-supercar performance • Sport-bike engine note • Tour mode ride comfort

CONS Overwrought exterior and interior design • Road/wind noise • The stripes shouldn't be stickers at this price

Zora must be smiling down on the 2023 Chevrolet Corvette Z06 from that great road course in the sky. More powerful and exotic Corvettes are coming, but this one may represent the zenith for America's sports car. It offers a Goldilocks combination of epic, linear, naturally aspirated power; just enough torque to keep two fat rear tires right at their limits of adhesion without heroic electronic intervention; and a balanced chassis carrying less than 40 percent of its mass up front. Electrifying the front axle, turbocharging this engine, and adding even more chassis wizardry may one day boost all the objective numbers, but we probably won't love such Corvettes as much.

Touch the starter, and the giant 5.5-liter flat-plane-crankshaft V-8's bark will wake neighbors before settling down to a jittery 800-rpm idle that, thanks to rigid engine mounts, makes the whole car tingle with a palpable sense of electricity that future battery-powered Corvettes will struggle to match. "It's worth its price on engine sound alone," buyer's guide director Zach Gale said. Features editor Christian Seabaugh added it "sounds like the trumpets of Jericho howling in your ear."

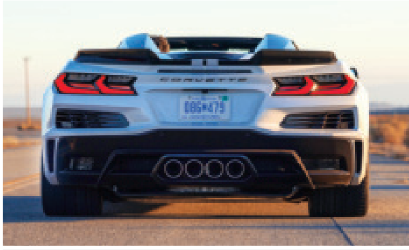
Most judges took extra laps of the winding course, searching for some indication of the Z06's handling limits but finding only their own—and this is the "base" setup, not the Z07. Seabaugh likened its turn-in response to video game physics, while Mexico editor Miguel Cortina proclaimed the steering as perhaps the closest he'd felt to Porsche's: "It's direct, precise, and accurate."

Our test team praised the transmission shift logic and its ability to tolerate repeated launch-control sprints. Road test editor Chris Walton appreciated that "it's not threatening in a way that some mid-engine cars can be" and likened the pedal action of the optional $8,495 carbon brakes to that of a Porsche 911 GT3—modulated strictly by pedal pressure, not travel. The Z06 clearly nails our engineering excellence criterion.

Our judges agreed the new Corvette Z06 begins to approach the performance drama of top-tier competitors like the Ferrari F8 Tributo, Lamborghini Huracán STO, McLaren 765LT, or Mercedes-AMG GT Black Series. That its Tour mode chassis setting offers comfort on par with or exceeding that of these cars' entry variants at roughly half their price (more like a third the performance variants' prices) stirred jingoistic pride in us and earned the Z06 huge value points.

Our praise for the Z06's engine and chassis performance was as unanimous as our disappointment in the car's overall design. Guest judge Chris Theodore felt the wider track and the redesigned side scoop graphic improved the C8's proportions and visually lengthened the car, but he found the aero add-ons (and 70th Anniversary sticker stripes) added further visual clutter to an already "enthusiastic, immature design."

The other criteria where the Corvette Z06 struggled somewhat were efficiency (it incurs a gas-guzzler tax of $2,600 to $3,000) and safety (no agency has tested a Corvette). But if the new Z06 had to sacrifice a little in those areas on the way to become a living legend, well, we imagine Zora wouldn't have it any other way. **Frank Markus**



2023 Chevrolet Corvette Z06 70th Anniversary Convertible (3LZ)

Base Price/As Tested	$136,140/$158,510
Power (SAE Net)	670 hp @ 8,400 rpm
Torque (SAE Net)	460 lb-ft @ 6,300 rpm
Accel, 0-60 mph	2.6 sec
Quarter Mile	10.6 sec @ 131.6 mph
Braking, 60-0 mph	99 ft
Lateral Acceleration	1.10 g (avg)
MT Figure Eight	22.7 sec @ 0.93 g (avg)
EPA City/Hwy/Comb	12/21/15 mpg
EPA Range, Comb	278 miles

VEHICLE LAYOUT Mid-engine, RWD, 2-pass, 2-door convertible **ENGINE, TRANSMISSION** 5.5L direct-injected DOHC 32-valve 90-degree V-8, 8-speed twin-clutch auto **CURB WEIGHT (F/R DIST)** 3,774 lb (39/61%) **WHEELBASE** 107.2 in **LENGTH x WIDTH x HEIGHT** 185.9 x 79.7 x 48.6 in **ON SALE** Now

Finalists

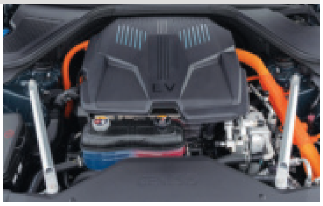
2023 Genesis Electrified G80

PROS **Looks great without rubbing its EV-ness in your face • Refined and powerful • Long legs and quick-charging capability**

CONS **Sometimes-uncomfortable driving position • Battery and motors eat into space • Shares infotainment with non-luxe products**

In our experience, vehicles that serve up both gas and electric powertrain options are masters of none. As the old Hyundai Ioniq demonstrated, building a package that suits both an internal combustion drivetrain and an electric one often results in compromises for both. So according to recent history, then, the 2023 Genesis Electrified G80 probably shouldn't be any good. Yet to our pleasant surprise the understated electric G80 is impressive and then some.

Riding on Genesis' M3 platform, the electric 2023 G80 throws out the standard G80's somewhat lackluster gas engines and running gear and in their place plops in a permanent-magnet electric motor at each axle and a big 87.2-kWh battery pack under the raised floor. Total system



output is a peak of 365 hp and 516 lb-ft of torque, 10 fewer ponies than the G80 Sport's 3.5-liter twin-turbo V-6 but 125 lb-ft more twist. The Electrified G80 can travel up to 282 miles on a full charge and is capable of quick charging with a 187-kW peak rate. Although that's not as quick as dedicated electric vehicles like Genesis' own GV60 (that SUV has a 235-kW rate), it's still enough to charge from 10 to 80 percent in as little as 22 minutes when plugged into an appropriately powerful Level 3 DC fast charger.

With rivals such as Mercedes-Benz falling to the temptation of making their EVs look, well, different, the Electrified G80's styling is refreshingly restrained. In fact, the only tells that electrons power this G80 are the lack of a fuel-filler flap and the silver grille with the charge port hidden cleverly within. In other words, the car is gorgeous. "The G80 has a beautiful design with great surfacing, a fastback profile, a nice ducktail, and all the pleasing details of its G90 sibling," guest judge Chris Theodore said. The interior design is lovely, too. "Stunning," technical director Frank Markus said. "I love the 'forged-wood' trim. It doesn't resemble anything else yet looks luxurious and interesting."

It shouldn't, given its Frankensteined construction, but the G80 drives just as nice as it looks. The twin-motor setup gives the Electrified G80 "buh-bye" passing power, replicating the feeling of a powerful but understressed V-8 in a near-silent and more efficient

package. And although the Electrified G80 is noticeably set up to be a plush-riding cruiser, it also handles fairly well, ensuring a competent chauffeur will have no problem outrunning trouble or simply roleplaying as a Secret Service agent outwitting an assassin.

That's not to say there are no compromises within the G80 EV. As mentioned, the big battery pack under the floor, coupled with the rear motor, eats into cabin space; the Electrified G80 sports 7.0 cubic feet less passenger

volume and 2.3 cubic feet less cargo volume compared to the gas G80. That may not sound like much on paper, but in practice it leads to a trunk that's too small for larger suitcases and a cabin that's less comfortable due to the high floor—a fairly glaring flaw for what's supposed to be a grand-touring road-tripper.

Even so, when you look past the slightly pinched accommodations, you find a superior G80 in the Electrified model. As for us? We were happy to be proven wrong. **Christian Seabaugh**

2023 Genesis G80 (Electric)	
Base Price/As Tested	$80,920/$81,495
Power (SAE Net)	182 hp (front), 182 hp (rear); 365 hp (comb)
Torque (SAE Net)	258 lb-ft (front), 258 lb-ft (rear); 516 lb-ft (comb)
Accel, 0-60 mph	4.1 sec
Quarter Mile	12.8 sec @ 106.1 mph
Braking, 60-0 mph	120 ft
Lateral Acceleration	0.91 g (avg)
MT Figure Eight	25.3 sec @ 0.73 g (avg)
EPA City/Hwy/Comb	105/89/97 mpg-e
EPA Range, Comb	282 miles

VEHICLE LAYOUT Front- and rear-motor, AWD, 5-pass, 4-door sedan **MOTORS, TRANSMISSIONS** Permanent-magnet electric, 1-speed automatic **CURB WEIGHT (F/R DIST)** 5,038 lb (49/51%) **WHEELBASE** 118.5 in **LENGTH x WIDTH x HEIGHT** 197.0 x 75.8 x 57.9 in **ON SALE** Now (select states)

2023 Honda Civic Type R

PROS Nicer, more feature-rich cabin • More power always welcome • Handles as well as—or even better than—before

CONS Is the styling too mature now? • Not particularly efficient for its size • Good luck getting one at its $44K MSRP

Shortly after the 2023 Honda Civic Type R made its debut, we had lots of questions. Is it going to be as great as before? Is the added power going to affect how it handles? Will it live up to our expectations? After spending a few days with the new Type R for our Car of the Year program, we're happy to report it continues to be among the best sporty cars available.

A quick glance at the judges' notes proves it. Guest judge Chris Theodore: "I would recommend it to anyone." Detroit editor Alisa Priddle: "It likes to turn and burn." Director of editorial operations Mike Floyd: "Wow, wow, wow. This is such a blast to drive." The comments go on and on.

Let's start with the basics. Using the updated Civic platform, the Type R adds a lot of hardware to make it special. Besides the 2.0-liter turbocharged inline-four engine that makes 315 hp and 310 lb-ft of torque, the Type R gains an active exhaust valve for a sonorous sound, an improved cooling system, a mechanical limited-slip differential, rev matching, and a stiffer body augmented by a retuned suspension and steering rack. But even with all these upgrades, making the Type R better than before was going to be a difficult task, and judges had mixed opinions about whether the new-generation car was definitively better than the outgoing model.

"It has Porsche-tier steering, brake, throttle, and shift feel, which puts the driver in a Zen mentality no matter if they're driving fast or slow," associate editor Billy Rehbock said. But despite consensus that the 2023 Type R is an enthusiast's dream, Priddle questioned whether Honda toned down the new model a smidge too much: "The previous generation was so incredibly fantastic, and I'm not sure this one measures up. Is my memory tinged by romanticism?"

Everyone who buys a Type R will do so primarily because of its performance, but its practicality also remains noteworthy. "A Civic Type R is a Civic before it's a Type R," buyer's guide director Zach Gale said. "That means a spacious back seat, a relatively capacious cargo area, and a high-quality interior." The 2023 model is wider, longer, and lower than before, and although it gained more weight as a result, it also added more comfort and amenities. The cabin is loaded with superb materials and technology, from the digital instrument cluster with its Formula 1–inspired shift indicator to a premium audio system.

All that good stuff comes at a cost, however, and as a result its starting price is much higher than the prior model's. That said, Honda only offers one trim level, and it comes fully loaded. "The Civic's cabin is simply so good, it even feels appropriate in the mid-$40,000 range," deputy editor Alexander Stoklosa said.

Honda's hot hatch won the judges' emotions, but ultimately we must consider it against our criteria, not our hearts. The Type R scored very well in that regard, too, so it was easy to select it as a finalist. "The new Honda Civic Type R is the best hot hatch on the U.S. market," Theodore opined. Yet potentially ranking at the top of its class isn't enough to make the Type R our 2023 Car of the Year. **Miguel Cortina**

2023 Honda Civic Type R	
Base Price/As Tested	$43,990/$43,990
Power (SAE Net)	315 hp @ 6,500 rpm
Torque (SAE Net)	310 lb-ft @ 2,600 rpm
Accel, 0-60 mph	5.3 sec
Quarter Mile	13.9 sec @ 104.2 mph
Braking, 60-0 mph	104 ft
Lateral Acceleration	1.03 g (avg)
MT Figure Eight	24.5 sec @ 0.76 g (avg)
EPA City/Hwy/Comb	22/28/24 mpg (est)
EPA Range, Comb	347 miles (est)

VEHICLE LAYOUT Front-engine, FWD, 4-pass, 4-door hatchback **ENGINE, TRANSMISSION** 2.0L turbo direct-injected DOHC 16-valve I-4, 6-speed manual **CURB WEIGHT (F/R DIST)** 3,165 lb (62/38%) **WHEELBASE** 107.7 in **LENGTH x WIDTH x HEIGHT** 180.9 x 74.4 x 55.4 in **ON SALE** Now

FINALISTS SPECS	**2023 Acura Integra A-Spec (CVT), *A-Spec (6MT)***	**2022 BMW 230i (Coupe), *M240i xDrive (Coupe)***	**2022 BMW i4 eDrive40, *M50 Gran Coupe***
POWERTRAIN/CHASSIS			
DRIVETRAIN LAYOUT	Front-engine, FWD	Front-engine, RWD, *AWD*	Rear-motor, RWD, *front- and rear-motor, AWD*
ENGINE/MOTOR TYPE	Turbo direct-injected DOHC 16-valve I-4, alum block/head	Turbo direct-injected DOHC 16-valve I-4, alum block/head; *turbo direct-injected DOHC 24-valve I-6, alum block/head*	Brushed synchronous electric
DISPLACEMENT	1,498cc/91.4 cu in	1,998cc/121.9 cu in, *2,998cc/182.9 cu in*	–
COMPRESSION RATIO	10.3:1	10.2:1	–
POWER (SAE NET)	200 hp @ 6,000 rpm	255 hp @ 5,000 rpm, *382 hp @ 5,800 rpm*	335 hp, *225 hp (front), 308 hp (rear); 536 hp (comb)*
TORQUE (SAE NET)	192 lb-ft @ 1,800 rpm	295 lb-ft @ 1,550 rpm, *369 lb-ft @ 1,800 rpm*	317 lb-ft, *267 lb-ft (front est), 323 lb-ft (rear est); 586 lb-ft (comb)*
REDLINE	6,500 rpm	6,500 rpm	–
WEIGHT TO POWER	15.6 lb/hp	13.9, *10.1* lb/hp	14.1, *9.4* lb/hp
TRANSMISSION(S)	Cont variable auto, *6-speed manual*	8-speed automatic	1-speed automatic
AXLE/FINAL DRIVE RATIO	5.05:1/2.04:1, *4.35:1/2.99:1*	2.81:1/1.80:1	8.77:1/8.77:1
SUSPENSION, FRONT; REAR	Struts, coil springs, adj shocks, anti-roll bar; multilink, coil springs, adj shocks, anti-roll bar	Struts, coil springs, adj shocks, anti-roll bar; multilink, coil springs, adj shocks, anti-roll bar	Struts, coil springs, *adj shocks*, anti-roll bar; multilink, air springs, *adj shocks*, anti-roll bar
STEERING RATIO	11.5:1	14.1:1, *13.6:1*	15.5:1, *14.1:1*
TURNS LOCK TO LOCK	2.2	2.1	2.7, *2.1*
BRAKES, F; R	12.3-in vented disc; 11.1-in disc	13.0-in, *14.7-in* vented disc; 13.0-in, *13.6-in* vented disc	13.7-in, *14.7-in* vented disc; 13.0-in, *13.6-in* vented disc
WHEELS, F; R	8.0 x 18-in cast aluminum	8.0 x 19-in, *8.5 x 19-in*; 8.5 x 19-in, *9.5 x 19-in* cast aluminum	8.5 x 19-in, *8.5 x 20-in*; 9.0 x 19-in, *10.0 x 20-in* cast aluminum
TIRES	235/40R18 91W Continental ContiProContact (M+S)	225/40R19 93Y; 255/35R19 96Y Pirelli P Zero (star), *245/35R19 93Y; 255/35R19 96Y Michelin Pilot Sport 4S (star)*	245/40R19 98Y; 255/40R19 100Y Hankook Ventus S1 Evo3 (star), *255/35R20 97Y; 285/30R20 99Y Pirelli P Zero Elect (star)*
DIMENSIONS			
WHEELBASE	107.7 in	107.9 in	112.4 in
TRACK, F/R	60.5/61.6 in	62.4/62.9, *62.2/62.8* in	62.6/63.2
LENGTH X WIDTH X HEIGHT	185.8 x 72.0 x 55.5 in	179.0 x 72.4 x 54.8, *179.4 x 72.4 x 55.3* in	188.5 x 72.9 x 57.0 in
TURNING CIRCLE	38.1 ft	36.4, *38.2* ft	41.0 ft
CURB WEIGHT (DIST F/R)	3,117 lb (61/39%), *3,040 lb (60/40%)*	3,535 lb (50/50%), *3,876 lb (53/47%)*	4,708 lb (45/55%), *5,012 lb (48/52%)*
SEATING CAPACITY	5	4	5
HEADROOM, F/R	37.6/36.4 in	39.8/35.0, *38.1/34.7* in	38.2/36.6 in
LEGROOM, F/R	42.3/37.4 in	41.8/32.2 in	41.5/34.2 in
SHOULDER ROOM, F/R	57.0/56.0 in	55.9/51.7 in	55.2/54.3 in
CARGO VOLUME	24.3 cu ft	10.0 cu ft	10.0 cu ft
TEST DATA			
ACCELERATION TO MPH			
0-30	3.2, *2.4* sec	1.9, *1.4* sec	2.0, *1.4* sec
0-40	4.5, *4.1*	2.8, *2.1*	2.8, *2.0*
0-50	5.9, *5.4*	3.9, *3.0*	3.7, *2.6*
0-60	7.6, *7.6*	5.3, *4.0*	4.7, *3.3*
0-70	9.6, *9.6*	7.0, *5.2*	6.0, *4.2*
0-80	12.0, *11.6*	8.8, *6.5*	7.5, *5.3*
0-90	14.9, *15.2*	11.0, *8.0*	9.3, *6.4*
0-100	18.5, *18.4*	13.6, *9.7*	11.3, *7.9*
PASSING, 45-65 MPH	3.4, *3.9*	2.8, *2.0*	2.1, *1.5*
QUARTER MILE	15.9 sec @ 92.9 mph, *15.6 sec @ 91.4 mph*	13.9 sec @ 100.7 mph, *12.4 sec @ 112.1 mph*	13.2 sec @ 108.1 mph, *11.6 sec @ 120.9 mph*
BRAKING, 60-0 MPH	121, *123* ft	112, *103* ft	117, *104* ft
LATERAL ACCELERATION	0.92, *0.87* g (avg)	0.92, *0.98* g (avg)	0.89, *0.94* g (avg)
***MT* FIGURE EIGHT**	26.6 sec @ 0.67 g (avg), *27.2 sec @ 0.63 g (avg)*	25.5 sec @ 0.71 g (avg), *24.4 sec @ 0.80 g (avg)*	25.8 sec @ 0.73 g (avg), *24.5 sec @ 0.80 g (avg)*
TOP-GEAR REVS @ 60 MPH	1,800, *2,200* rpm	1,300 rpm	5,000 rpm
CONSUMER INFO			
BASE PRICE	$33,895, *$36,895*	$37,345, *$49,545*	$56,395, *$66,895*
PRICE AS TESTED	$34,395, *$37,395*	$46,570, *$59,920*	$64,820, *$76,670*
AIRBAGS	10: Dual front, f/r side, f/r curtain, front knee	10: Dual front, f/r side, f/r curtain, front knee	8: Dual front, front side, f/r curtain, front knee
BASIC WARRANTY	4 years/50,000 miles	4 years/50,000 miles	4 years/50,000 miles
POWERTRAIN WARRANTY	6 years/70,000 miles	4 years/50,000 miles	4 years/50,000 miles, 8 years/100,000 miles (battery)
ROADSIDE ASSISTANCE	4 years/50,000 miles	4 years/unlimited miles	4 years/unlimited miles
FUEL CAPACITY	12.4 gal	13.7 gal	81.5 kWh
EPA CITY/HWY/COMB ECON	29/36/32, *26/36/30* mpg	26/35/29, *23/32/26* mpg	100/98/99, *79/80/80* mpg-e
EPA RANGE, COMB	397, *372* miles	397, *356* miles	282, *227* miles
RECOMMENDED FUEL	Unleaded premium	Unleaded premium	240-volt electricity, 480-volt electricity
ON SALE	Now	Now	Now

2023 Chevrolet Corvette Z06 70th Anniversary (Convertible)	2023 Genesis G80 (Electrified)	2023 Honda Civic Type R
Mid-engine, RWD	Front- and rear-motor, AWD	Front-engine, FWD
Direct-injected DOHC 32-valve 90-degree V-8, alum block/heads	Permanent-magnet electric	Turbo direct-injected DOHC 16-valve I-4, alum block/head
5,463cc/333.4 cu in	–	1,996cc/121.8 cu in
12.5:1	–	9.8:1
670 hp @ 8,400 rpm	182 hp (front), 182 hp (rear); 365 hp (comb)	315 hp @ 6,500 rpm
460 lb-ft @ 6,300 rpm	258 lb-ft (front), 258 lb-ft (rear); 516 lb-ft (comb)	310 lb-ft @ 2,600 rpm
8,500 rpm	–	7,000 rpm
5.6 lb/hp	13.8 lb/hp	10.0 lb/hp
8-speed twin-clutch auto	1-speed automatic	6-speed manual
5.56:1/1.83:1	10.65:1/10.65:1	3.84:1/2.82:1
Control arms, coil springs, adj shocks, anti-roll bar; multilink, coil springs, adj shocks, anti-roll bar	Multilink, coil springs, adj shocks, anti-roll bar; multilink, coil springs, adj shocks, anti-roll bar	Struts, coil springs, adj shocks, anti-roll bar; multilink, coil springs, adj shocks, anti-roll bar
15.7:1	11.2:1	11.6-14.9:1
2.5	2.3	2.1
15.7-in vented, drilled carbon-ceramic disc; 15.4-in vented, drilled carbon-ceramic disc	14.2-in vented disc; 14.2-in vented disc	13.8-in vented disc; 12.0-in disc
10.0 x 20-in; 13.0 x 21-in forged aluminum	8.5 x 19-in; 9.5 x 19-in cast aluminum	9.5 x 19-in forged aluminum
275/30R20 97Y; 345/25R21 104Y Michelin Pilot Sport 4S ZP	245/45R19 102W; 275/40R19 105W Michelin Primacy Tour A/S (M+S)	265/30ZR19 93Y Michelin Pilot Sport 4S
107.2 in	118.5 in	107.7 in
66.3/66.1 in	64.2/64.4 in	64.0/63.5 in
185.9 x 79.7 x 48.6 in	197.0 x 75.8 x 57.9 in	180.9 x 74.4 x 55.4 in
36.4 ft	38.1 ft	39.9 ft
3,774 lb (39/61%)	5,038 lb (49/51%)	3,165 lb (62/38%)
2	5	4
37.9 in	40.3/36.6 in	39.3/37.1 in
42.8 in	42.1/35.9 in	42.3/37.4 in
54.4 in	58.3/57.1 in	57.0 (est)/56.0 in
12.6 cu ft	10.8 cu ft	24.5 cu ft
1.0 sec	1.5 sec	2.1 sec
1.5	2.2	3.2
2.0	3.0	4.2
2.6	4.1	5.3
3.3	5.4	7.0
4.1	7.0	8.6
5.0	8.9	10.7
6.0	11.2	12.9
1.2	2.2	2.6
10.6 sec @ 131.6 mph	12.8 sec @ 106.1 mph	13.9 sec @ 104.2 mph
99 ft	120 ft	104 ft
1.10 g (avg)	0.91 g (avg)	1.03 g (avg)
22.7 sec @ 0.93 g (avg)	25.3 sec @ 0.73 g (avg)	24.5 sec @ 0.76 g (avg)
1,300 rpm	6,050 rpm	2,200 rpm
$136,140	$80,920	$43,990
$158,210	$81,495	$43,990
4: Dual front, side	10: Dual front, front center, f/r side, f/r curtain, driver knee	10: Dual front, f/r side, f/r curtain, front knee
3 years/36,000 miles	5 years/60,000 miles	3 years/36,000 miles
5 years/60,000 miles	10 years/100,000 miles (including battery)	5 years/60,000 miles
5 years/60,000 miles	5 years/unlimited miles	3 years/36,000 miles
18.5 gal	87.2 kWh	12.4 gal
12/21/15 mpg	105/89/97 mpg-e	22/28/24 mpg (est)
278 miles	282 miles	347 miles (est)
Unleaded premium	240-/480-/800-volt electricity	Unleaded premium
Now	Now (select states)	Now

MOTORTREND CAR OF THE YEAR 2023®

WORDS FRANK MARKUS
PHOTOGRAPHY EVAN KLEIN

3RD-TIME CHARMER

GOOD LISTENING, FAST LEARNING, SAVVY ENGINEERING, AND AVANT-GARDE DESIGN MAKE THE GENESIS G90 OUR 2023 CAR OF THE YEAR

Forged carbon trim with inlaid aluminum marks a long-overdue departure from wood. Placing the instrument light dimmer and trunk release switches within easy view and reach of the steering wheel is another fresh take we appreciate. Rotary transmission and infotainment control knobs are unmistakably differentiated. Perhaps best of all, the cockpit isn't overwhelmed by gigantic screens.

Cars are becoming a niche commodity. Once the dominant form of family transportation, the "car" as we once knew it now toes the endangered segment list. Just 11 years ago we enjoyed our biggest *MotorTrend* Car of the Year field ever, at 35 entrants—triple the number of SUV contestants that year. Four years later, new SUVs outnumbered cars (by one), and now for 2023 they more than doubled our COTY field. And as cars get rarer, they're also becoming rarified. The few remaining producers of mainstream econoboxes, compacts, and midsize sedans fielded no newcomers this year. In their place was a roster of mostly sporty or luxurious contestants. Among them, one outshone its own competitive set to a degree we don't always see in our Of The Year contests: the 2023 Genesis G90.

We're gratified to see Genesis appears to read our words and act on them. Quickly. In our 2017 COTY contest, we knocked the original G90 for its conservative styling and lack of technical innovation. Just three years later we invited a refreshed G90 sporting bold new styling and other enhancements to our 2020 event. Then we criticized its underwhelming V-8 and lack of interior innovation, concluding with: "A word of advice—a truly new G90 with the G80's jewelry would be killer."

And voilà. Another three short years later, with nearly all our advice followed and criticisms addressed, the upstart luxury brand (founded November 4, 2015) sent us this completely new flagship. The 2023 Genesis G90 takes careful aim at industry stalwarts like the Mercedes-Benz S-Class, the BMW 7 Series, and the Audi A8 and very nearly strikes a bull's-eye. This created a sense of déjà vu in our older judges, who vividly recall the similar splash made more than 30 years ago by another disruptive newcomer: the Lexus LS400. As probably happened back then, Genesis is also likely spending money, sacrificing profits, and doing the hard work required to earn a place at the ultra-luxury table.

This latest crop of Genesis vehicles reveals an innovative brand flexing its design and engineering muscles. It no longer strives to be a fast-follower, "reverse-engineering" fads and features originated by its competitors; instead, it's a leader in this heady space. Genesis vehicles can now sell on their own legitimate merits, not simply as bargain alternatives to the establishment benchmarks. No surprise, this ranked the G90 strongly against our Of The Year criteria.

Advancement in Design

The face-lifted first-gen G90 successfully grafted Genesis' new shield-grille face and horizontal-bar lighting motif onto an existing design, making it look more interesting. This year's complete redesign gently refines that look while introducing a new silhouette, which guest judge Chris Theodore described as "a modern take

on the classic formal roof that comes off quite fresh." The simple departure from the established fastback norm caused some judges to suggest perhaps the G90 advances design more in its segment than any other contestant. "It's elegant, formal, and timeless in a way its competitors aren't," features editor Christian Seabaugh said. "I think the G90 is going to age incredibly well."

Another Genesis design innovation is the twin-bar head- and taillight design that wraps far around the sides of the car at both ends, including some of the slimmest LED rear parking light elements we've seen and novel front marker lights that continue aft of the front wheels. These features truly help distinguish the G90 at night, though Theodore questioned the choice of white lenses for those front markers, suggesting, "A crystal lens might be more appropriate."

The interior also gets a welcome makeover. Every choice of font, feature, ergonomic control, and trim material is brilliantly executed for a luxury sedan. Our judges noted the elegant jeweled rotary gearshift and dial to navigate the center screen. It's a confident look that falls on the right side of ostentatious. You won't find the G80's 3D gauges, and the G90 offers no rear entertainment screens, because faking that third dimension degrades the digital instrument cluster's resolution, and sensible rich folks know tablets are the smarter, more future-proof alternative. Buyer's guide director Zach Gale approved of the cluster's graphics but lamented its limited configurations. "Even Kia has better options on the Sorento," he said. Sounds like an easy over-the-air upgrade.

Performance of Intended Function

This might be the G90's strongest suit, or at least the one where it flexed its innovation muscles the most. "Genesis engineers came up with and solved problems I didn't know I had!" deputy editor Alex Stoklosa

said. Throughout the week, the nine judges kept sharing surprise-and-delight features they uncovered while exploring the G90's settings and switches, like turn-signal noises played only in the driver's headrest speakers so as not to disturb the passengers. Or a blue-level light adjustment for the rear seat's comfort/audio control screen to help passengers sleep at night.

Nobody missed obvious spiffs like the power-releasing and -closing doors. Simply press a button on e-SC models, front or rear, and the doors motor shut. Like in a Rolls-Royce Phantom. And as a bonus, the redundant mechanical switch to open the doors is clearly visible in the cubby below the armrest with a light shining on it. There's also a UV-C sterilization compartment in the rear center console.

The Bang & Olufsen sound system eschews sound-equalizer sliders in favor of a "Beosonic" tone-adjustment cursor you move along a vertical axis marked Warm to Bright and a horizontal one from Relaxed to Energetic. You can adjust surround sound or choose from three preset ambient environments.

The seats offer a choice of four massage programs at three intensity levels and three session lengths. Best of all: Once you've chosen your preferred setup, you can begin or resume it with a button on the door, saving a dive into the screen menus.

The Mood Curator offers four programs that tailor ambient lighting, HVAC, sunroof and rear-window screen positions, seat massage, sound, and scent selections to suit in a way that manages not to feel contrived or hokey. And where others offer a single scent, Genesis provides two, one that's more vitalizing and the other more relaxing. Most judges scheduled an extended ride in the right rear seat (footrest up, front passenger seat slid forward out of the way), with the suspension set to Chauffeur mode, sampling these moods. Most came away convinced this is among the most comfortable and cosseting luxury sedans in the world. "It's basically a spa on wheels," said associate editor Billy Rehbock, who was nevertheless dismayed at the lack of wireless Apple CarPlay and Android Auto. (Genesis isn't satisfied with the Bluetooth link's reliability.)

Stoklosa noted the new luxury features "all work and enhance your experience. Therefore, nothing feels like frippery—even though it's all frippery."

Engineering Excellence

The above earned points in this category, but the powertrain and chassis earned their own plaudits. The base 3.5L Smartstream FR twin-turbo V-6 engine is familiar from the G80, GV70, and GV80, but an electrically supercharged version of it replaces the previous G90's Tau V-8, trading 11 hp for 22 lb-ft more torque, which suits the luxury mission well. It idles silently at just 500 rpm and wafts away either quietly or with a muted snarl (depending on whether Active Sound Design is set to minimize or enhance the engine note), and it drives with the sure-footedness of now-standard AWD.

The ride quality of the top-level air suspension with adaptive damping drew high praise, especially in Chauffeur mode, which softens the rear suspension. This induces sufficient float to allow both front and rear suspensions to top out on our simulated railroad crossing at 45 mph. Forward-facing cameras also inform the suspension of upcoming bumps and potholes, supposedly preparing them for impacts. With the car lacking any means of actively moving a wheel up and over or down into such imperfections, most judges struggled to notice or appreciate this feature, but one long-serving evaluator declared the G90 the best-riding car he's experienced on our Car of the Year test tracks and roads.

RIDE QUALITY DREW HIGH PRAISE. ONE LONG-SERVING EVALUATOR DECLARED THE G90 THE BEST-RIDING CAR HE'S EXPERIENCED AT CAR OF THE YEAR.

The adaptive cruise control supports automatic lane changes and permits extended hands-off time. Best of all, the whole thing can be set at a single touch, without "running through a sequence of button presses like you're arming a nuclear warhead," Stoklosa said.

Clearly the engineers understood that occasionally customers with the means and inclination to own such a car may find themselves being pursued by bad people. Sport mode firms everything up just enough that, along with the added nimbleness afforded by the rear steering (standard with e-SC), the G90 comports itself rather respectably when the adrenaline's up. It's no Mercedes-AMG S63, however, and aggressive braking or an incipient drift will earn occupants a strong automated seat belt hug.

Value

Having helmed a few vehicle engineering and development programs in his day, Theodore openly questioned whether Genesis can possibly have brought this vehicle to market profitably at the prices it charges ($99,795 for the base model, $101,295 with the e-SC package). Genesis certainly wouldn't be the first manufacturer to "buy its way into" a lucrative market by initially selling at a nominal loss. Buyers seem to be getting a product that in many ways trumps the establishment players in terms of performance, features, and luxury materials, all at a cost that undercuts them significantly. "Mercedes S-Class levels of features, comfort, and luxury at a 10 percent discount," Seabaugh said. "For anyone turned off by Mercedes' tech-über-alles direction, the G90 ought to be tremendously appealing." Some wondered whether the Genesis badge and comparatively low price might put off buyers who view such things as proxies for premium. Whether for that reason or because increasing demand permits profit taking, we don't expect the G90's present value proposition to last long.

Safety

NHTSA has yet to test the G90, but the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety has, awarding its highest rating of Top Safety Pick+. The G90 earned the highest rating in every category but two: front crash prevention: vehicle to pedestrian (Acceptable, not Superior) and LATCH child-seat attachment ease (where it earned Acceptable instead of Good).

Efficiency

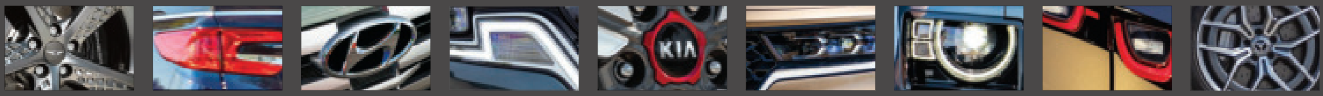
The switch from an optional V-8 to all twin-turbo V-6 propulsion delivered a slight improvement in this area: The base engine is up 1 mpg city/combined and 2 mpg highway relative to last year's 3.3T AWD, and the e-SC improves by 1 mpg city/highway and 2 mpg combined versus the 5.0 V-8 AWD. Still, the G90 by far scores lowest in this criterion. Hyundai Group vehicles generally have higher curb weights in-class, which affects efficiency. Gale noted: "17/24 mpg compares poorly to the Mercedes S 500 4Matic, which is both more efficient and quicker. This is becoming a pattern for Genesis." Then again, in the executive luxury sedan market, this is arguably the criterion that matters least to buyers.

The main thing Mercedes offers that Genesis hasn't matched is its broad array of powertrain choices and model variants. But variants might not be so difficult to add: Genesis sells a longer-wheelbase model in other markets that's a better match for Maybach models, for example.

Our judges' summations make the case for the G90 as *MotorTrend*'s 2023 Car of the Year: "I believe it to be the best luxury car on the market, regardless of price," Theodore said. "Beautifully designed and crafted, it appears to have no peers." Rehbock asked rhetorically, "Does this rewrite the executive limo rulebook? It does." Finally, Stoklosa commented, "Mercedes has absolutely owned the luxury full-size sedan class for decades, so for Genesis to, on its third try, break through with something as polished, as compelling, yet somehow unique from the S-Class is stunning. Highly original yet desirable." Our advice: Get one while the pricing's hot. ■

2023 Genesis G90 AWD (3.5T e-SC)

POWERTRAIN/CHASSIS	
DRIVETRAIN LAYOUT	Front-engine, AWD
ENGINE TYPE	Twin-turbo + elec supercharged port- and direct-injected DOHC 24-valve 60-degree V-6, alum block/heads
DISPLACEMENT	3,470cc/211.8 cu in
COMPRESSION RATIO	11.0:1
POWER (SAE NET)	409 hp @ 5,800 rpm
TORQUE (SAE NET)	405 lb-ft @ 1,300 rpm
REDLINE	6,000 rpm
WEIGHT TO POWER	12.4 lb/hp
TRANSMISSION	8-speed automatic
AXLE/FINAL DRIVE RATIO	3.72:1/2.07:1
SUSPENSION, FRONT; REAR	Multilink, air springs, adj shocks, anti-roll bar; multilink, air springs, adj shocks, anti-roll bar
STEERING RATIO	12.0:1
TURNS LOCK TO LOCK	2.1
BRAKES, F; R	14.2-in vented disc; 14.2-in vented disc
WHEELS	8.5 x 21-in; 9.5 x 21-in cast aluminum
TIRES	245/40R21 100V; 275/35R21 103V Michelin Primacy Tour A/S
DIMENSIONS	
WHEELBASE	125.2 in
TRACK, F/R	65.2/65.4
LENGTH X WIDTH X HEIGHT	207.7 x 76.0 x 58.7 in
TURNING CIRCLE	37.1 ft
CURB WEIGHT (DIST F/R)	5,073 lb (50/50%)
SEATING CAPACITY	5
HEADROOM, F/R	39.4/38.0 in
LEGROOM, F/R	42.3/37.8 in
SHOULDER ROOM, F/R	59.1/57.9 in
CARGO VOLUME	10.6 cu ft
TEST DATA	
ACCELERATION TO MPH	
0-30	2.3 sec
0-40	3.1
0-50	4.2
0-60	5.4
0-70	7.0
0-80	8.6
0-90	10.4
0-100	12.6
PASSING, 45-65 MPH	2.5
QUARTER MILE	13.9 sec @ 105.4 mph
BRAKING, 60-0 MPH	123 ft
LATERAL ACCELERATION	0.86 g (avg)
***MT* FIGURE EIGHT**	26.3 sec @ 0.68 g (avg)
TOP-GEAR REVS @ 60 MPH	1,400 rpm
CONSUMER INFO	
BASE PRICE	$99,795
PRICE AS TESTED	$101,295
AIRBAGS	10: Dual front, front center, f/r side, f/r curtain, driver knee
BASIC WARRANTY	5 years/60,000 miles
POWERTRAIN WARRANTY	10 years/100,000 miles
ROADSIDE ASSISTANCE	5 years/unlimited miles
FUEL CAPACITY	19.3 gal
EPA CITY/HWY/COMB ECON	17/24/20 mpg
EPA RANGE, COMB	386 miles
RECOMMENDED FUEL	Unleaded premium
ON SALE	Now

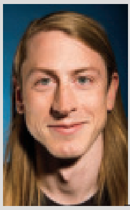


MT GARAGE

Updates on our long-term fleet

PHOTOGRAPHY *MT* STAFF

2021 Land Rover Defender 110



"We hit the Land Rover parts and accessories catalog for a couple crucial upgrades."
Christian Seabaugh

Service Life 9 months/11,453 miles
Average Fuel Econ 15.1 miles

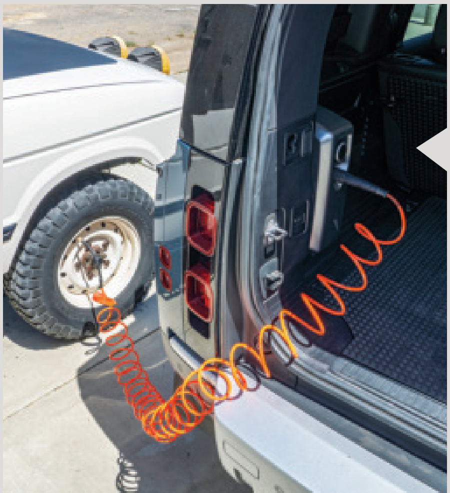
Unresolved problems None
Maintenance cost $0 **Normal wear** $0
Base price $64,050 **As tested** $74,960
EPA City/Hwy/Comb fuel econ 17/22/19 mpg

I don't normally like modifying vehicles because, in my experience, it's a quick way to ruin them. I ruined my old Ford Mustang GT by fitting it with a loud, droney exhaust, bigger wheels, and stickier tires. We ruined a long-term Scion FR-S, also by fitting it with bigger, stickier rubber and a louder, dronier exhaust. Between those two projects and driving enough modified cars to fill a showroom, I've concluded that maybe, just maybe, the well-compensated men and women responsible for designing and engineering new cars know what they're doing.

Yet when it came to our Defender 110 one-year test vehicle, we couldn't resist. No, we didn't repeat past mistakes of futzing with wheels, tires, and exhaust. Instead, we hit the Land Rover accessories catalog to tack on some overlandy bits.

Our Defender 110 already came well equipped from the factory thanks to its Explorer Accessory pack ($4,800 for mudflaps, wheel arch protectors, a hood decal, a snorkel, a side-mounted gear carrier, and the expedition roof rack), but one element was missing: a roof ladder. Mounted on the driver side between the C- and D-pillars, the new deployable ladder allows for access to the roof rack, making it easier to load and unload oversized items. So far we haven't needed to use the ladder a ton, but had it been installed at the time, it would have made camping with a rooftop tent far easier. Back in the before-pandemic times, I used it to access a roof-stashed spare tire and MaxTrax when overlanding a similarly equipped Defender 110 across Namibia.

The integrated air compressor is by far my favorite accessory, though. Mounted up to the left side of the cargo area and hardwired to the Defender's electrical system, it inflates and deflates a tire to a preset pressure, with a maximum of around 60 psi. It includes a 16.4-foot self-coiling hose that can reach all four tires, and it stores neatly in a little case under the load floor. We've used it to air down and up for a recent beach day, add air to a wheelbarrow's tire, and top off a staffer's '90s Discovery (pictured, below left).



Although Land Rover sent us the $885.80 ladder and $1,071.60 air compressor gratis for testing, we paid for installation ourselves. And like we do with all our long-term vehicles, we used our local dealership to do the dirty work. Installation took the better part of the day and came to $964 for the

UPDATE
RIVIAN
R1T
TOYOTA
MIRAI
NISSAN
ROGUE
RAM
1500 TRX
UPDATE
VOLVO
XC40

Land Rover's ladder might look a little rickety, but it's rated for up to 350 pounds, ensuring safe roof access.

compressor and $735 for the ladder, totaling an eye-watering $1,699 Visa swipe.

Were we properly motivated, the ladder installation could've been tackled in a driveway. It requires removing the roof rack and drilling some holes into the Defender's flanks, but it doesn't seem difficult.

We wouldn't hesitate to have the compressor professionally installed again. Doing so requires taking apart the cargo area, as well as drilling, bolting, and wiring. It's possible to DIY, but we'd rather have the peace of mind that the air compressor will work properly when called upon—and that a hacked wiring harness won't catch fire.

2021 Mercedes-Benz E 450

"How much of a difference do new tires really make? We found out."
Zach Gale

Service Life **10 mo/11,023 miles**
Average Fuel Econ **22.9 mpg**

Unresolved problems None
Maintenance cost $0
Normal wear $0
Base price $63,050 **As tested** $72,770
EPA City/Hwy/Comb fuel econ 23/30/26 mpg

We like the E-Class a ton, but something has disappointed us with our yearlong test car. How could a model providing such sublime ride quality in our initial testing deliver more average responses with subsequent use? Without switching to 18-inch wheels like the 2021 Car of the Year–winning sedan, we decided to install a new set of tires to see if we could improve the picture. And things did change, but not in the way we hoped.

For a luxury sedan, our E 450 simply permitted too much road noise into the cabin over imperfect surfaces. We found the car rides too rough, as well. It's a tough balance, meeting expectations for handling and acceleration while being comfortable and luxurious. There's nothing egregious here, but it's not as good as a couple editors remember from our 2021 Car of the Year testing. With the available air suspension and the quiet Acoustic Comfort package, our E 450 should have everything it needs to be a great highway cruiser.

Choose 19-inch wheels, though, and your experience may echo ours. On a recent road trip to Gilroy, California (about 350 miles north of Los Angeles), Mexico editor Miguel Cortina found plenty to like but wanted more from the ride quality and less highway noise. "Wind noise is relatively controlled, but tire noise is definitely louder," he said.

We then replaced our Goodyear Eagle Sport all-season run-flat tires (245/40R19s) with a set of Bridgestone DriveGuards—an all-season run-flat tire designed more for ride comfort and longevity than sport.

To our surprise, the new Bridgestone tires made their biggest impact on the track, not on the street. Braking distance from 60 mph shrank from a subpar 135 feet to just 122. That's a more class-competitive number. Acceleration to 60 mph improved by 0.1 second, to 4.5, but the beauty of this mild hybrid I-6 powertrain has always been the way it feels on the street, not its surprisingly quick sprinting abilities.

Handling improved, too. The E 450 cornered at 0.89 g (average) on the skidpad, up from 0.86 g before the tire swap. Thanks to the new tires, the Mercedes also upped its figure-eight performance. A *MotorTrend* signature test, the figure eight evaluates braking, cornering, acceleration, and the transitions in between. Pre-swap, the E 450 finished the figure-eight course in 26.3 seconds at 0.68 g (average). With the updated rubber, those numbers improved to 25.7 seconds at 0.72 g.

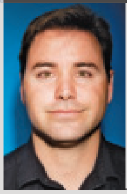
Here's what road test editor Chris Walton had to say: "It does appear these tires have better grip than the previous ones. They didn't fall off a cliff this time. It's decent and predictable under braking, then it turns in nicely and takes a very neutral balance. There's even a whiff of oversteer that the all-wheel drive sorts out nicely. Overall, it's probably much sportier than most E 450 drivers will need—a noticeable improvement in demeanor and results."

What didn't appreciably change, however, was comfort or noise suppression. Our E 450 still feels about the same for ride quality and highway tire noise as before. That's unfortunate, but we're at least pleased with the performance results. Just like the E 450's superb powertrain, the value of the added performance on a luxury sedan isn't in using it every day but in knowing it's there.

As of this writing, the Bridgestones cost $273.99 per tire, or about $1,100 for a set of four. Although run-flats can ride harsher than other rubber, we were reminded of their value on the way back from testing. After hitting a nasty pothole and blowing out a tire, the staffer at the wheel was able to safely drive a couple additional miles to the office.

Having said that, some of us still wish our E 450's tire noise on the highway and its ride were better. Our advice remains unchanged: If you're considering an E-Class in 450 form, pair the standard 18-inch wheels with the air suspension—otherwise, consider the more performance-oriented E 53.

2022 Rivian R1T



"We tried to do a weekend camping trip without stopping to charge. We almost didn't make it." Scott Evans

Service Life 4 months/9,712 miles
Average Fuel Econ 65.6 mpg-e

Unresolved problems None
Maintenance cost $0 **Normal wear** $0
Base price $74,075 **As tested** $76,875
EPA City/Hwy/Comb fuel econ 74/66/70 mpg-e

People buy EVs for all sorts of reasons—fuel costs being top of mind recently—but at least a few buy them to be friendlier to the environment. Without getting into whether mining or oil drilling is more destructive, the simple fact is, electric motors operate more efficiently than internal combustion engines and don't produce exhaust fumes everywhere you go. With that in mind, we decided to take our long-term R1T for an all-electric, fossil-fuel-free camping trip in the mountains. It didn't quite go to plan.

My camping trip should've been the ideal use case for someone who's buying a lifestyle truck more than a work truck. Our campsite near Big Bear Lake, California, is 109 miles from my house in Inglewood. With an EPA-estimated 314 miles of range and only a 218-mile round trip, we should've had plenty of buffer. That's good because Big Bear sits at 6,752 feet, and Inglewood is just above sea level. Climbing the mountain would certainly eat range, but we'd gain most of it back using regenerative braking on the way back down.

Even better, I'd recently installed solar panels on my roof and programmed the R1T to only charge during daylight hours leading up to the trip, so the trip would be powered entirely by the sun. We even left the propane camp stove at home and planned a menu that required no cooking or could be done over an open fire. (Our Rivian doesn't have the optional camp kitchen, which would have drastically increased our cooking options.)

Just to be safe, we didn't plan to do much driving once we arrived. The campground was right outside town, so we could walk in if we needed anything small. The only real concern was overnight temperatures. Even when L.A. is steaming hot, Big Bear can drop into the low 30s overnight, and we'd be there four nights.

It started off well enough. Based on my recent driving habits and with a 100 percent charge, the truck showed 292 miles of range in its most efficient Conserve mode (which decouples the rear motors to save power and lowers the truck for better aerodynamics). A little more than an hour and 76 miles of freeway driving later, we reached the bottom of the mountain with 227 miles of range remaining, slightly beating the truck's estimate. So far, so good.

Climbing the last 33 miles, as expected, did a number on our range. By the time we reached the campground, it was down to 153 miles, and the battery charge sat at 53 percent. I didn't worry about it because I knew we'd regenerate power going downhill on the way back.

My bigger worry was losing range while we slept, as we've noticed the R1T sheds a couple miles overnight, even in warm weather. With such a big battery and a home EV charger, it hasn't been a concern. But EVs lose more range in the cold, which worried me.

Sure enough, I woke up the first morning to see the truck's range had fallen to 132 miles, and the battery was down to 45 percent. After night two, range had plummeted to 98 miles and the battery to 33 percent. Still, that was nearly enough to get home, especially after generating power and range on the way down the mountain.

Night three put an end to that fantasy. Range was now 63 miles, and the battery sat at 21 percent, meaning our R1T had lost 90 miles of range and 32 percent of its

Rivian's Bluetooth speaker doubles as a lantern—nice to have while camping.

This flashlight comes standard and stores in the R1T's driver-side door. You can also buy one separately for $225.

charge basically just sitting there. We asked Rivian about this outsized battery drain, and in addition to cold temperatures, the company cited the need to keep certain computers in the truck powered and ready so the driver can get in and go immediately instead of waiting for everything to boot up. After this trip, an over-the-air software update we installed included new code Rivian says will reduce phantom power drain by 15 percent. This was done by better identifying exactly which computers need to stay powered at all times and which can go into a low-power mode without hurting the user experience, Rivian says. We'll see how much it helps this winter.

That was of little help in Big Bear, though, where it was time to start looking up public charging stations, of which the area had exactly zero. There was a Level 2 public charger at a cafe 17 miles away in Running Springs, or I could pay the local tow company $150 an hour for the privilege of using their Level 2 charger. A real estate office had a Tesla Wall Connector, but I didn't have an adapter that would allow me to use it (a problem since rectified, thanks to Lectron).

Then I spotted a glimmer of hope. A few of the innumerable short-term rental cabins in the area were equipped with a type of Level 2 home charger from AllyVolt that allows it to be rented out to the public for a fee via its app. Unfortunately, none appeared to be online when I downloaded the app.

Running out of ideas, I put out the call on a *MotorTrend* Slack channel. Road test analyst Alan Lau came through with EVmatch, an app that allows owners of Level 2 home chargers to share or rent their chargers to other users. There were a few in the area. But spending half the afternoon at some nice stranger's charger didn't sound like how I wanted to spend my last day camping.

That charger in Running Springs, though, was still in range and on the way home, so even if the battery was very low by the time we left camp, we could head there and charge while we ate. We had no delusions about charging enough to get home; the goal was to get enough juice to make it to a fast charger at the bottom of the mountain.

As expected, range fell again on night four. Checking the Rivian app when I awoke, I was greeted with 34 miles of range and just 12 percent battery left. By the time we got in the truck, it was down to 32 miles and 11 percent.

We decided to go for it and make for Running Springs. If all went well, we could skip the stop and coast down the hill to the faster charger at the bottom. We knew we could get to the cafe; it was only 17 miles away. In theory, we could even make it to the fast charger, which was 31 miles away.

There's a catch, though. Big Bear Lake isn't the highest point in the journey between there and my house. That would be Lakeview Point, which sits at 7,112 feet, 360 feet higher. Those first 10 miles out of town, driving with the climate control and stereo off, the windows rolled down slightly (but not too much), were nerve-wracking. We reached Lakeview Point with 23 miles of range left and the battery sitting at just 8 percent.

We made it. It was all downhill from there, literally. By the time we made the Level 2 charger in Running Springs, the battery was up to 9 percent, and range had increased to 26 miles even though we'd driven 7 miles down from the point. Even better, we had less than 15 all-downhill miles to go to the fast charger. We went for it.

Fifteen miles of regenerative braking later, we rolled into a Walmart parking lot with 46 miles of range and the battery up to 16 percent. It was only a 50-kW charger, about as slow as fast chargers get, but it's still at least five times faster than a Level 2 charger.

If only I could get it to work. First, the charger refused to authorize my credit card. After entering my card data into the EVGo app, it fired up, only for the truck to shut it down over a software glitch. A half hour of messing with both netted us 4 miles of range and a 1 percent increase in battery charge.

A full vehicle reset on the truck (done by holding the leftmost steering wheel button and the emergency flasher button simultaneously for several seconds) fixed the glitch. The truck estimated a full charge would take two hours and 45 minutes, but we didn't need that. It was only 78 miles to home.

WE'VE NOTICED THE R1T LOSES A COUPLE MILES OF RANGE OVERNIGHT. IN COLD WEATHER, IT LOSES EVEN MORE.

Forty-two minutes later, slowed by running the truck's AC at full blast while charging to combat the 95-degree outside temperature, we left with the battery at 41 percent and 123 miles of range. I added 45 miles of buffer mostly so I could continue to blast the A/C while driving 80 mph all the way home, neither of which is great for efficiency.

With light traffic, it was an easy drive, and we arrived with 46 miles of range and 30 percent battery remaining.

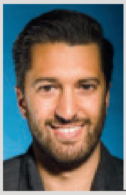
Not only did we make it with only one unplanned charging stop, but I also achieved my goal of using zero fossil fuels. The fast charger had a sign announcing it was powered entirely by renewable energy, in this case from a nearby wind farm that provides all of the electricity to this part of the county thanks to near constant winds.

What's more, my specific charging problem was solved less than a month later with the installation of Big Bear's first public 50-kW DC fast charger. A mile and a half from our campsite, we could've dropped the truck off earlier in the trip and gone to eat or even walked back to the campground.

Bottom line: Although this particular trip got stressful, solutions existed, and I made it out fine with a little on-the-spot planning. What's more, this exact scenario no longer exists. Yes, EVs do still have some limitations compared to gas-powered vehicles, but they're usually not difficult to work around, and they're shrinking every day.

This particular charger was an oasis in an EV desert, but continual infrastructure improvements are making charging easier.

2022 Genesis GV70



Service Life 3 months/5,133 miles
Average Fuel Econ 18.8 mpg

"The compact luxury SUV segment is hot, and the GV70 is on fire." **Miguel Cortina**

Unresolved problems None **Maintenance cost** $0
Normal wear $0 **Base price** $54,195 **As tested** $64,670
EPA City/Hwy/Comb fuel econ 19/25/21 mpg

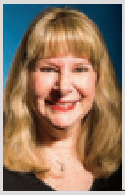
With almost every luxury car company making SUV customers a priority, buyers can choose from more than a dozen fancy small SUVs. With so many models out there, there's virtually an option for everyone. We've spent a lot of time driving the newest, most fascinating compact luxury SUVs, and after analyzing all the entries, the 2022 Genesis GV70 remains the best one. We can't think of a more compelling product that aces styling, handling, comfort, technology, and value.

We haven't taken the GV70 on a road trip yet, but we've spent lots of time driving family members and friends around town. Virtually everyone offers nice comments or asks questions. I met up with a friend for dinner, and she was impressed with the exterior and interior design. Another friend described the interior as being "like a spaceship" and was taken aback when a video popped up on the instrument cluster showing the blind spot when the turn signal was on. Still, the question we get the most is, "What's Genesis?"

A few weeks ago, I had the chance to drive the base 2022 Porsche Macan and a 2022 Alfa Romeo Stelvio Veloce. Both SUVs compete in the same segment as the GV70, but neither felt as complete as the Genesis. Keeping in mind our long-termer has the optional 3.5-liter twin-turbo V-6, and the Macan and Stelvio were powered by their respective four-cylinder engines, the GV70 handles better, has more equipment, and scores higher on value. What's more, both the Stelvio and Macan checked out at around $62,000, whereas our top-trim GV70 is just a couple thousand bucks extra but comes with all the bells and whistles and a more powerful engine. A fully loaded V-6 Macan S would cost almost $90,000, and although the Stelvio Quadrifoglio is much more powerful than the GV70, it would cost $89,190. Besides, everything inside and outside the GV70 feels nicer in quality than the Porsche or Alfa Romeo.

But despite our love, the GV70 is not perfect. There's no option for wireless Apple CarPlay—a feature now found in the base Hyundai Elantra. The infotainment system's weather app often doesn't work, and we've noted minor squeaks coming from the driver-side door panel. We're nitpicking here, but our GV70 is only a few months old.

2022 Hyundai Santa Cruz



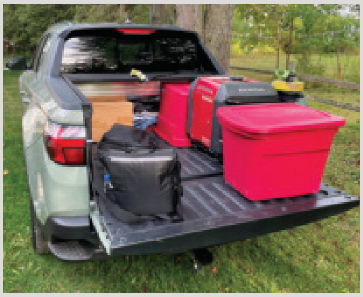
Service Life 2 months/2,722 miles
Average Fuel Econ 23.4 mpg

"A pickup without a functional bed is not much of a truck. How does the Santa Cruz stack up?" **Alisa Priddle**

Unresolved problems None **Maintenance cost** $0
Normal wear $0 **Base price** $37,425 **As tested** $38,020
EPA City/Hwy/Comb fuel econ 19/27/22 mpg

Many buyers of full-size pickups have work to do, and a strong truck with a large bed is mission critical. Others just like the feel of a large body-on-frame vehicle around them, content with the knowledge their truck can handle anything from a trip to the hardware store to helping a buddy move a mattress. But full-size trucks keep getting bigger, making them harder to park or fit in a garage, which has led to a resurgence in the popularity of midsize and compact pickups. For many consumers, those smaller lifestyle trucks, like our long-term Santa Cruz, are taking the place of a car or SUV as a daily urban driver with the fringe benefits of a truck bed.

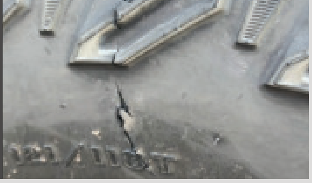
The 4.0-foot composite-molded bed features fixed anchor points, rails for adjustable tie-down cleats, and a factory-integrated retractable and lockable hard tonneau cover. Its payload is a not-too-shabby 1,411 pounds for our loaded all-wheel-drive model. Despite its small size, the bed was designed to accommodate 4-by-8-foot sheets of plywood with the tailgate open. Even with the tailgate up, our truck holds a decent amount of stuff. Four slots are molded into the bed to hold planks to create a second level for loading things, presumably when the cover is open. For a trip north, even with the cover closed, we filled it with bedding, luggage, and assorted household items for a vacation.



Of course, you can only pile things so high with a hard tonneau cover. This was an issue for technical director Frank Markus, who was headed to his cabin and found it was a tight squeeze for the plastic storage bins that contained a week's worth of supplies. "It's nice to have a rigid tonneau cover," he said, "but that roll-up feature robs valuable space in the front of the pickup box, which is minimal to begin with. The depth of the bed is not enough to cover the Honda generator we needed to bring up." The tonneau only locks into position in one place—at the half-open mark—but the generator needed more space.

In another nod to its car and SUV roots, the truck has a hidden in-bed trunk with a built-in drain. The trunk extends almost the width of the vehicle, but it's shallow. It can handle four or five grocery bags laid down like swaddled quintuplets, and it keeps goods cool and dry, even if the bed is left open. There are no cargo nets or tiedowns; the space is tight enough that items sliding will rarely be an issue.

Small storage cubbies on each side of the bed provide a place to stash work gloves or straps so they don't bounce around. One of them can be outfitted with a 115-volt power outlet, which is handy. And if all of that isn't enough, there's more storage under the back seat, and the Hyundai can accommodate roof racks. Bottom line: The Santa Cruz has the functionality of a pickup and the carlike ride of an SUV.



2021 Ram 1500 TRX

Service Life 11 months/19,625 miles
Average Fuel Econ 10.5 mpg

"A transcontinental overlanding expedition caused a bit of damage. Here's a rundown."

Jonny Lieberman

Unresolved problems None **Maintenance cost** $365.74 (2x oil change, inspection, tire rotation; 1x in-cabin filter)
Normal wear $0 **Base price** $72,020
As tested $91,185 **EPA City/Hwy/Comb fuel econ** 10/14/12 mpg

We beat up our long-term Ram 1500 TRX good. I mean real good. How, you ask? Well, you might remember that Trans-American Trail story we did. For reasons now lost to the winds of time (or is that an archived Slack channel?), we decided a not-so-quick, totally hardcore, beat-it-like-a-rented-mule cross-country off-road journey was the proper way to welcome the mighty TRX—our 2021 Truck of the Year—into our long-term fleet. Little did we know the supply chain would face a crisis, so fixing our TRX meant it was out of commission for several months.

Setting aside the expected flat tires and dents that come with driving thousands of miles off-road, the first notable damage occurred during a poorly planned gravel-road drag race, which left three cracks in the windshield. (Note: Damage incurred on a coast-to-coast off-road trip is not "normal" wear and thus is not reflected above.)

Several small bumps and bruises later, in Utah, a wheel nearly fell off. "There were bad vibrations while driving, which we chalked up to the bucketloads of mud caked in all the wheels," features editor Scott Evans said. "Roughly an hour later, at 80 mph, I noticed the left rear wheel wobbling like crazy in my door mirror. I pulled off the road quickly and safely before it came off. Three of the wheel studs had sheared off, and the other three's lug nuts were very loose. It was moments away from breaking off the truck entirely. We had it towed into town, where a local shop replaced all six wheel studs and lug nuts that night and got us back on the road. We junked the rim, as the lug holes were no longer round."

In addition to wheel issues, the windshield continued taking a battering. "By the end, the windshield was more cracked than not, and you could feel the cracks on the inside," photographer William Walker said. But that wasn't the last of it. By the journey's final leg, "the brake rotors were warped badly, and the vibration under braking was disturbing. A door seal leaked while fording water, and the front passenger compartment seemed perpetually wet after. And we noticed the sunroof got damaged because of mud and dust."

Later, Walker noticed a noise coming from the rear driver-side wheel at low speeds if he had the window down. We investigated, and it was a failed bearing attached to the rear axle shaft, and the entire thing was replaced as a unit. We think this repair is related to the busted lugs, but we have no way to prove it.

Somewhere along the way, the air vents all but ceased blowing cold air. "My guess is the system lost some refrigerant, suffered debilitating blockage, possibly damage to the blower, or all three," deputy editor Alexander Stoklosa said. "Someone shook out the cabin filters, and it made no difference."

The final severe blow, which no one owned up to (we think the damage occurred in Moab): The front bumper needed replacement. It was this more than anything that really held up finishing repairs. Moral of this story? Sometimes you need to worry about more than consumables if you plan on overlanding across a continent.

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Verdict: 2021 Honda Odyssey EX-L

It's been a while since minivans were cool—if they ever were—but for the right kind of buyer, there's really no match for the functionality one can offer.

"After spending a year with the Odyssey, we've learned a lot, and we're sad to see our faithful companion go."
Ed Loh

Base Price $39,635 **As Tested** $39,635

OPTIONS None
Problem areas Cross-threaded wheel bolt
Maintenance cost $218.31 (2x inspection, oil change, tire rotation)
Normal wear $0
3-year residual value* $37,700 (95%)
Recalls None

*IntelliChoice data; assumes 42,000 miles at the end of three years.

Service Life 12 months/18,258 miles **Average Fuel Econ** 19.3 mpg

Dear Honda Manufacturing of Alabama employees,

When we first received your Obsidian Blue Pearl 2021 Honda Odyssey EX-L (VIN ending in 7577), we were elated to finally have the opportunity to use a minivan for one of its many intended purposes: kid hauling. Over the past few years, our editorial team has gone through a bit of a baby boom, including a new arrival for yours truly, so we were looking forward to getting down and diaper dirty in the familiest of family cars.

We got off to a strong start by sending the Odyssey from Los Angeles to Arizona with two staffers, in support of a baseball tournament and a couple of family road trips. *MotorTrend*'s King of the Highway took it on a series of epic quests, and then our buyer's guide leader took his clan on a 1,000-mile odyssey. But after front-loading the highway miles, we hit a bit of a mid-loan lull, where nobody seemed very interested in going anywhere, except for a run up to Pebble Beach with the Loh fam, your author's longest road trip of the loan. Ever-changing COVID conditions created strong incentives to stay at home, so by the end of 12 months, we only amassed 18,258 miles, 1,800 miles short of our goal.

Along the way, we did manage to achieve an overall fuel economy of 19.3 mpg. This is right on target for the Odyssey's 19-mpg EPA city rating and almost identical to the overall fuel economy we logged with our last long-term test minivan, a 2018 Chrysler Pacifica. We do wish we saw an average closer to the EPA combined rating (22 mpg), but the numbers make sense, as we largely schlepped the Odyssey on short trips to the beach and parks nearby and resupply runs to Target, Trader Joe's, and Vons. The longest regular trip we'd make would be to visit a set of grandparents, 60 miles away.

For the rookie parents, your Odyssey won us over with its smart packaging and comfortable second-row seating area (where parents often split their time). The tilting, sliding (fore, aft, and side to side) second-row seats, with an easily removable middle jump seat, were the perfect perch for a new mother to peer into a hideously expensive rear-facing child seat and spy upon the head position and breathing pattern of her napping newborn while furiously whispering to her husband to slow down. Ask me how I know.

The leather-covered seats were not only comfortable for these spying sessions but also seemingly impervious to myriad newborn lotions, potions, and secretions, as nearly every horizontal surface in the car was deployed for diaper changes. Note to new parents: The huge cargo area, with its low load height, looks like a great place for changing a baby, but stooping over can be hell on the back. You'll want the higher working area provided by any of the seats. The pull-up shades for the second-row windows were also greatly appreciated—both for keeping the sun off our son and to increase privacy for a nursing mother.

For our trips to the beach, that massive cargo area created by the disappearing third row easily swallowed our largest stroller, collapsible beach wagon, sun tent, cooler, and all the towels, blankets, sand toys, and diapers with room to spare—even for long items, like a 7-foot surfboard via the aisle between the second-row seats.

And then there's the feature that separates minivans from all others. If you've never experienced the joys of remotely triggered sliding doors, you have never truly lived—or attempted to get into a car while carrying a sleeping child in his seat, along with a diaper bag and a couple of bags of groceries. The easy access pays off in these extreme situations, but it's the little things, too: Tight parking spaces are no match for doors that slide. Nor are odors; the ability to pop both doors and the back hatch to air out a particularly noxious blowout cannot be overstated.

While junior consistently overdelivered in that area, the Odyssey gave us precious little to poop on. Most of our quibbles were about options we wished we had selected, like Cabin Watch for baby spying, or options no longer available (HondaVac for errant puff collection).

The only specific quibble from the helm was a bit of hesitation after pushing the gas pedal. It's not something you would notice if the Odyssey is your sole daily driver, but it's something you pick up if you're in and out of other cars. It's worth noting that once underway, the Odyssey moves briskly (quickest in its class, dontcha know) with a revvy engine note that reminds you of Honda's roots. Passenger complaints were also few—on the hottest of days, adults in the third row mentioned the lack of cooling air flow and tunes from the sound system.

We visited our local Honda dealership for two scheduled service appointments. The first one we wrote about extensively, because the very reasonable $92.52 oil change, multipoint inspection, and tire rotation grew by another $417.34 to repair a cross-threaded lug nut. A few of you emailed wondering why this was not covered under warranty, so we asked. American Honda's PR rep replied, "It seems very likely that the repair would have been covered under warranty ..." if we had asked the service adviser.

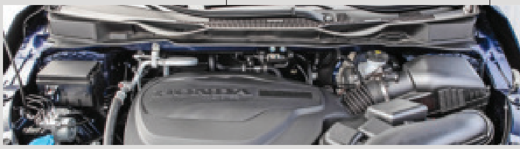
Our second and final service appointment (B1, in Honda-speak), was a blissfully uneventful oil change, inspection, and tire rotation that cost us $125.79. In total, we spent $218.31 in regular maintenance on the Odyssey, which is reasonable in comparison to the last two minivans we tested: $276.88 for two service appointments for our 2018 Chrysler Pacifica and $364.30 for four scheduled appointments with our 2016 Kia Sedona. It's also in line with the many three-row SUVs we've had in our long-term fleet, which range from as low as $0 (for brands that cover routine maintenance) to as much as $350 in a year.

As the newest parents on staff to spend time with your minivan, we'd like to say thank you and salute the Honda of Alabama employees who screwed together our Odyssey (except for the lug nut fella—he owes us 400 bucks). After getting over the initial hump of being a mom in a minivan, my wife quickly became a convert. She loved the space, convenience, and stress reduction that came with being anonymous. Your author was 180 degrees the other direction: proudly stoked to have the ability to carry everyone and everything we needed, 24/7, no questions asked. Over time, the Odyssey became a stalwart and trusted friend. And like every good friend, we were sad to see it go.

Sincerely,
Ed and the *MotorTrend* Team

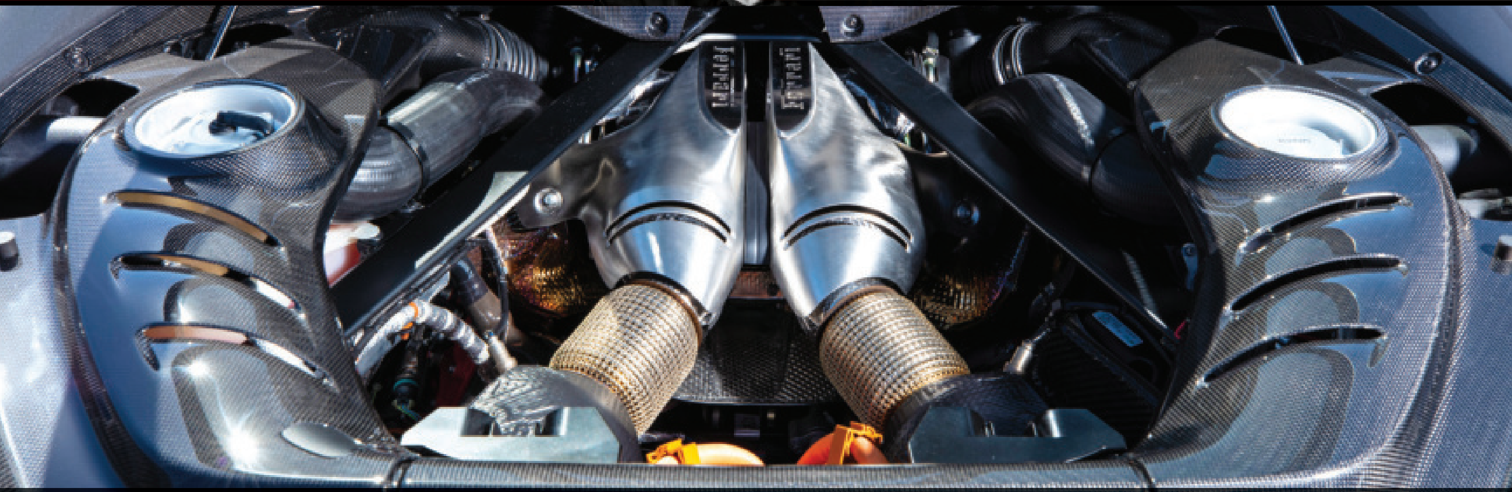
2021 Honda Odyssey (EX-L)

POWERTRAIN/CHASSIS	
DRIVETRAIN LAYOUT	Front-engine, FWD
ENGINE TYPE	60-deg V-6, alum block/heads
VALVETRAIN	SOHC, 4 valves/cyl
DISPLACEMENT	221.8 cu in/3,471cc
COMPRESSION RATIO	11.5:1
POWER (SAE NET)	280 hp @ 6,000 rpm
TORQUE (SAE NET)	262 lb-ft @ 4,700 rpm
REDLINE	6,750 rpm
WEIGHT TO POWER	16.1 lb/hp
TRANSMISSION	10-speed automatic
AXLE/FINAL DRIVE RATIO	3.61:1/1.87:1
SUSPENSION, FRONT; REAR	Struts, coil springs, anti-roll bar; multilink, coil springs, anti-roll bar
STEERING RATIO	14.4:1
TURNS LOCK TO LOCK	3.0
BRAKES, F; R	12.6-in vented disc; 13.0-in disc
WHEELS	7.5 x 18-in cast aluminum
TIRES	235/60R18 103H Bridgestone Turanza EL440 (M+S)
DIMENSIONS	
WHEELBASE	118.1 in
TRACK, F/R	67.3/67.2 in
LENGTH X WIDTH X HEIGHT	205.2 x 78.5 x 69.6 in
TURNING CIRCLE	39.6 ft
CURB WEIGHT (F/R DIST)	4,515 lb (55/45%)
TOWING CAPACITY	3,500 lb
SEATING CAPACITY	8
HEADROOM, F/M/R	38.7/39.2/38.3 in
LEGROOM, F/M/R	40.9/40.9/38.1 in
SHOULDER ROOM, F/M/R	63.1/61.6/60.0in
CARGO VOLUME, BEH F/M/R	140.7/86.6/32.8 cu ft
TEST DATA	
ACCELERATION TO MPH	
0-30	2.6 sec
0-40	3.7
0-50	5.1
0-60	6.7
0-70	8.7
0-80	11.1
0-90	13.7
PASSING, 45-65 MPH	3.3
QUARTER MILE	15.1 sec @ 94.4 mph
BRAKING, 60-0 MPH	119 ft
LATERAL ACCELERATION	0.75 g (avg)
***MT* FIGURE EIGHT**	28.9 sec @ 0.57 g (avg)
TOP-GEAR REVS @ 60 MPH	1,500 rpm
CONSUMER INFO	
BASE PRICE	$39,635
PRICE AS TESTED	$39,635
AIRBAGS	8: Dual front, front side, f/m/r curtain, front knee
BASIC WARRANTY	3 years/36,000 miles
POWERTRAIN WARRANTY	5 years/60,000 miles
ROADSIDE ASSISTANCE	3 years/36,000 miles
FUEL CAPACITY	19.5 gal
EPA CITY/HWY/COMB ECON	19/28/22 mpg
EPA RANGE, COMB	429 miles
RECOMMENDED FUEL	Unleaded regular
ON SALE	Now



Angus MacKenzie

The Big Picture



Can a Ferrari without a screaming engine truly be a Ferrari?

Appointed Ferrari CEO last year, Benedetto Vigna is an interesting choice to lead Italy's most iconic automotive company. For a start, he's never worked in the car business.

A trim 53-year-old with a ready smile, Vigna is a physicist with decades of experience in the microchip industry. The closest he got to automaking during his 26-year career at Swiss company STMicroelectronics was to lead the development of a low-cost three-dimensional motion sensor intended for airbag systems. He later refined the design so it could serve within the wireless controllers of Nintendo Wii gaming consoles.

As with many Italians, though, the Prancing Horse holds a special place in Vigna's heart. "Ferrari has always been with me, since I was I child," he says, recalling the small model Ferrari he always carried in his pocket to race among the stones near his house in southern Italy. At 14 he jumped into a car with four of his friends and, without telling his parents, rode almost 500 miles north to Imola to watch the Formula 1 San Marino Grand Prix. "My true incentive for understanding physics was to find a way to improve our TV's terrible reception on race days," he jokes.

The real challenge: persuading the world electric-powered Ferraris are real Ferraris.

Vigna is now tasked with guiding Ferrari through an era of profound change for the automotive industry. Few of the certainties of the past can be relied on to construct a business road map for the future.

Fortunately, Maranello is in a good place right now. Cars like the 296 GTB, a plug-in hybrid with a V-6 internal combustion engine—a powertrain that would have caused howls of outrage from the purists a few years ago—reveal a coolly confident Ferrari at the top of its game, a company unafraid to embrace cutting-edge, even controversial, technologies to create the best-performing, best-handling, best-driving sports cars it knows how to build. Yet the 296 GTB is in many ways still a traditional Ferrari; Vigna will oversee the launch of Ferraris that are anything but traditional, cars that could be the most polarizing vehicles ever to wear the Prancing Horse badge.

It's tempting to suggest the new Purosangue crossover, the first production four-door Ferrari in history, is one of them. But the Purosangue is, once you get past the door count and the ride height, also a relatively traditional Ferrari. Just a single screaming full-throttle run to the 715-hp V-12's 8,250-rpm redline proves this.

Vigna's real challenge will be to persuade the world electric-powered Ferraris are real Ferraris. He says he wants 40 percent of the firm's model range to be electric-powered by 2030. However, he's careful not to say he expects 40 percent of all the Ferraris sold by 2030 will be electric-powered. He knows Ferrari is an emotional marque, perhaps one of the most emotional consumer brands in the world, and much of that emotion is underpinned by the explosive *vivacissimo* of air and gasoline meeting spark ignition. Can an electric-powered Ferrari ever deliver such emotion?

Vigna believes it can. For a start, electric Ferraris, he says, will not be silent supercars. "Each electric engine—I like to say electric engine, not motor—has its own signature," he says, adding that the company is working on patented concepts to make those signatures an integrated and desirable element of the electric Ferrari experience.

Beyond that, Vigna says, Ferrari's electric cars will boast motors whose design is based on learnings from the Ferrari F1 team's long experience with bleeding-edge hybrid technology. And those motors will all be built in Maranello, as will the inverters, which will use silicon-carbide technology to allow high voltage and high power. The batteries will also be built in-house, handcrafted to be fully integrated within the vehicle structure, reducing weight. The cars will use the racing team's most advanced aerodynamics concepts to reduce drag.

Vigna's point is that Ferrari is no EV neophyte. "Our electric journey is not starting now," he says. "It started in 2009 with Formula 1. The full electric Ferrari will be ... a Ferrari." ■

The 296 GTB (above) is a plug-in hybrid, but few would confuse it for anything but a Ferrari. CEO Benedetto Vigna hopes to achieve the same thing with full electrification.

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